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JULY 5

ARGOSY
WEEKLY

RED STAR MAGAZINE
7-5

ARGOSY
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The Year's Most Striking Story

EAST WIND

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W. C. TUTTLE
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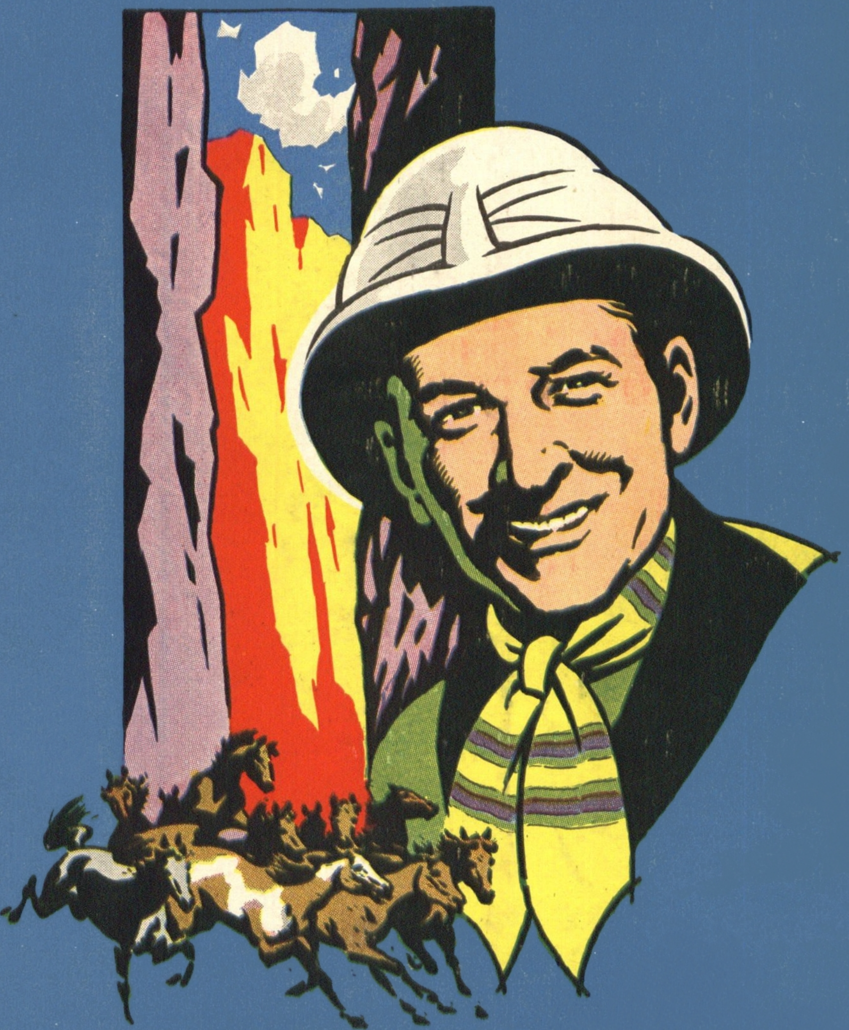
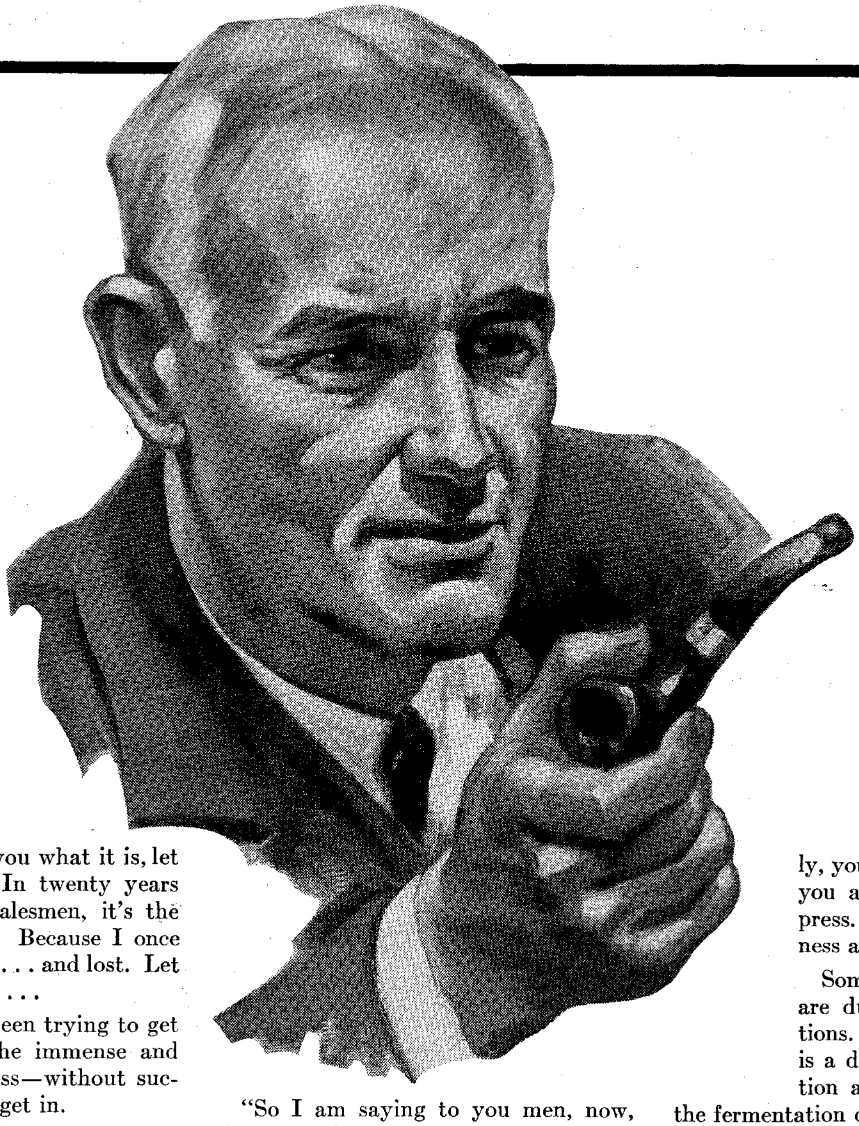


Bring-'em-Back-Breathing McNally Hunts Painted Colts and Finds Galloping Adventure

I DON'T CARE HOW LUCKY YOU ARE
there's *one chance* you dare not take!



"BEFORE I tell you what it is, let me say this: In twenty years of handling salesmen, it's the No. 1 Jonah. I know. Because I once took the chance myself . . . and lost. Let me give you the picture . . .

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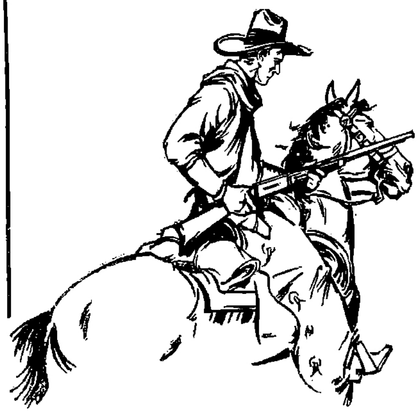

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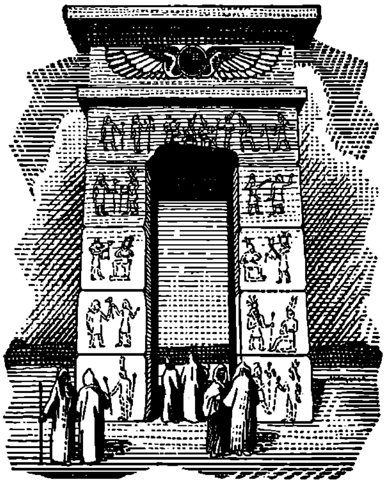

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ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 309 CONTENTS JULY 5, 1941 Number 1

Coming Soon!

The Cardinal's rakehellies are riding again! Cleve and d'Entreville, those two mad, roistering soldiers of Richelieu, wield their splendid blades for Adventure and for France in

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A stirring, colorful new novel of sinister intrigue and furious battle in Old Europe. By

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The first book-length novel of Cleve and d'Entreville.

LITTLE HORSES, WHAT NOW?—*Novelet*...**Richard Wormser** 6

Get along, McNally. You're stranded in the badlands with a drunken Aztec and a broiling sun, but just ahead there's a million-dollar merry-go-round

MEN OF DARING—*True Story in Pictures*......**Stookie Allen** 18

Bishop and Kain—War Aces

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The saga of a Polish town, tiny and yet magnificent—and of the woman who was the heart of its magnificence

THREE GUNS FOR TONTO—*Second of three parts*. **W. C. Tuttle** 27

Tonight Sheriff Henry will drive a stage down the dangerous road to skulduggery

TRAITOR'S KEY—*Novelet*..................**William DuBois** 39

They're streamlined pirates, at home in the sky or under the sea; they work so silently that only three men can hear them—three men who find pleasure in peril

FORWARD INTO BATTLE—*Fifth of eight parts* ....**Charles Marquis Warren** 50

This is Stew Marchant, who curses his country and greets his friends with gunfire

JUST A DREAMER—*Short Story*..............**Robert Arthur** 60

Sleep well, Mr. Weem, and pleasant dreams; there's money in them—and probably Cleopatra

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

A **RED STAR** *Magazine*

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N.Y.
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President & Treasurer WILLIAM T. DEWART, JR., Secretary
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE, 111 Rue Réaumur

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FRANK BUNCE

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L. G. BLOCHMAN

Major, Here's Mules

Introducing Pvt. Cowpoke, who volunteered for duty in Camp Calamity. There he proceeded cheerily to demonstrate that he could un-mechanize an army, and make a general like it. A story of army-camp life by

SAM CARSON

Coming in next Week's Argosy—July 12

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30x5.00-20	**2.40**	1.05
5.25-17	**2.45**	1.15
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29x5.25-19	**2.45**	1.15
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5.50-17	**2.75**	1.15
28x5.50-18	**2.75**	1.15
29x5.50-19	**2.75**	1.15
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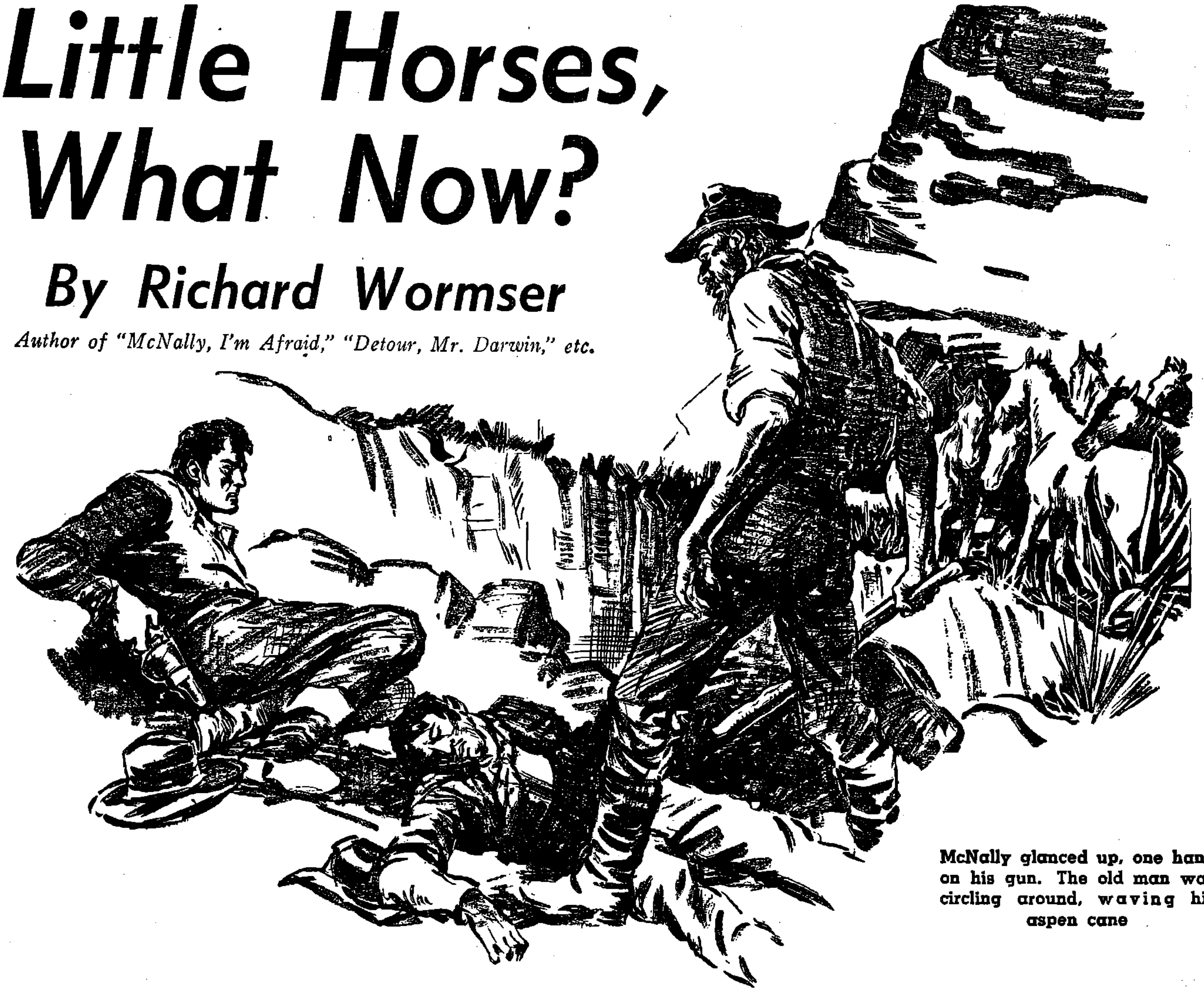
Little Horses, What Now?

By Richard Wormser

Author of "McNally, I'm Afraid," "Detour, Mr. Darwin," etc.



McNally glanced up, one hand on his gun. The old man was circling around, waving his aspen cane

This is a story about how McNally (remember?) herded a merry-go-round on the hoof, and how the merry-go-round broke down. However—it's also about two bottles of Bourbon, an extinct Indian, a crackpot ventriloquist, and an uncuddly woman who didn't think the white man was noble. Take your choice of any or all items

I

WHEN McNally pulled into the gas station, the attendant promptly perched a portable air conditioner into the open window of the coupe. Ice cold air flowed out of the white box and over McNally's dripping face and neck. The lean man let it flow, though that much cold on top of that much perspiration would probably give him pneumonia, rheumatism and green-apple colic.

The gas pumper went back into his steel office and brought out a glass of water and a capsule. He broke the capsule into the glass, and handed it to the customer. McNally drank, turning the empty capsule wrapping over in his fingers.

Saloro, he read. *A saline capsule designed to prevent cramps in steel workers, and others employed near furnaces.*

McNally stared out into the desert night. Somewhere behind the filling station a one-lung gas motor chugged, whipping up current for the bright lights of the station; bats and huge moths fluttered under the lights. "Always this hot here?"

The attendant had on a leather-peaked service cap; up till now it had shaded his face, but now he looked up, McNally saw he was an Indian. "Not so bad in January," the Indian said. "Sometimes gets seventy, eighty at night in January. Nice."

"What do you do in the daytime now, in June?" McNally asked.

"Sweat. You want five gallons gas?"

McNally said: "Fill 'er up."

"Five gallons to the customer. Truck ain't due for two weeks, gotta save gas."

McNally nodded. "Oke."

He leaned back, enjoying the air machine, while the Indian turned the pump on. His brown fingers turned the map over. He was forty miles into the Snake Indian Reserve in southern Arizona. The name of this station was Black Tourmaline. It was only fifteen miles further to Vandie Ricker's trading post, according to the map, but the map itself left a margin for error by putting in a dotted line, and a note: *Make Local Inquiry.*

McNally made local inquiry. "How far to Ricker's?"

The Shoshone said: "Fifteen, twenty miles. You make it in an hour easy. Two bucks."

"Two bucks?"

"Forty cents the gallon. Includes state, federal taxes."

McNally shrugged, and peeled off two one-dollar bills from a roll that was soggy with the sweat that had come through his trousers and the leather of the wallet. "Oke. Say, buck. Do you know anything about the ponies that are supposed to run in a canyon just past Ricker's?"

The red man said: "Shu. Not ponies. Li'l hosses. Pretty damn fast, but got weak backs. You from the Smithsonian?"

McNally laughed. "You Southwesterners think every scientist is from the Smithsonian; but I'm not even a scientist. I collect wild animals. I make 'em tame. I show 'em in side shows, fairs, vaudeville stages. Get it?"

"Wild animal, huh?"

"Call it a sucker, if you want to save time." McNally was in no hurry to drive on. It was midnight now, and he'd been on the road from Los Angeles since morning. Only an hour more; and maybe there was no cold-air machine at Ricker's.

"SURE. I used to work abroad. Africa a lot, sometimes South America, sometimes Asia. Used to go to Europe and pick up finished acts for circuses, shows, Billy Rose. No more. Not till the war's over. So I'm two-bittin' down here for a herd of wild ponies."

"No damn good," the Indian said. "I'm frank wit' you. Weak backs."

"Well, I got a weak mind." McNally shook his head. "There's a little girl in Hollywood—you know, where they make the talking pictures? She's nine years old, and she makes five grand a week. You know, five thousand big round ones, like you Indians say."

"Sure. Five grand. Mister, I'm eddicated. I went to Reservation School, up in the Western Navvy country."

"You're not a Navajo?"

"Nope. Aztec."

"You're kidding?"

The Indian reached out and unhooked the air-conditioner. He put it on the ground. He picked up a tire iron. "Oke. Two bucks, all paid up. G'bye."

"Whoa, whoa. If you want to be an Aztec, it's all right with me. You're not kidding."

"Oke."

"Only this is the Shoshone country and— All right. All right. What's your name?" McNally fished cigarettes out of the glove compartment—he had ruined one pack carrying it in his pocket—and dealt the butts.

"I don't know whether I can tell you," the Aztec said. "Navajos don't tell their names. Shoshones tell everything. On accounta I'm the only Aztec left, I don' know what we do." He picked up the cold-air pumper, and put it back to work.

"I see." McNally sighed. "You got a Social Security card?"

The Aztec beamed broadly, smoke flowing out of his flat nose. He produced a wallet, and showed the card through the cellophane window. "Reilly Aztec, D.V.M."

McNally shoved his Stetson back on his head. "D.V.M.? Distinguished—"

"Doctor Veterinary Medicine," the Aztec said.

"T'hell!" McNally looked around the little filling station, blankly. Then he looked at the flat Indian face.

"Think I'm kiddin'?"

"No, no. But how come—"

"I work a time in a vet hospital in L.A. Work some in Phoenix. I don't like Pekingeses."

McNally roared with laughter. He shoved his hand out over the top of the white air-conditioner. "Reilly, you're all right. Mine's Dave McNally."

"I heard of you."

McNally said, "If you weren't an Indian, I'd buy a drink."

"My mama was an Irish lady." Reilly Aztec never smiled. "Anyway, Aztecs don't count. They aren't *American* Indians."

McNally opened the glove compartment. "It's just wasting it, when you're sweating this hard, but here goes." He passed over the leather-bound flask, and they each took a swallow. McNally said: "I can drop the pidgin talk then. And you can drop the blanket buck act, city boy. Why, then, you've heard of Little Sally Dewey, the golden-haired darling of a nation?"

"Sure," Reilly Aztec said. "The kid actress."

"So. Little Sally's sore. She spits at her producer and bites her director. Only last week she threw an apple core at Darryl Zanuck. You know why?"

"Bellyache?"

"Naw. One of the other Hollywood babies—Withers, Temple, I dunno—has a real live merry-go-round in the backyard. Shetland ponies."

"Yeah," Reilly Aztec said. "When I work in L.A., we send one of those kid actors a monthly bill of two hundred bucks just for defleaing dogs. They love animals, these kids. Especially if there's a photographer around."

"ANYWAY," Dave McNally said, "Little Sally's in the middle of a picture. They are shooting all the scenes in which she's—mischievous—and now they are starting on all the scenes in which her dolly's busted or her aunt's dead or something, and she's crying.

"This is Tuesday. See? But next Monday I've got to be back with six or eight Shoshone Canyon dwarf horses, ready to work out in a merry-go-round in *her* back yard. More expensive, rarer, faster than Shetlands."

Reilly Aztec said: "Well, shut my pretty little rosebud of a mouth. Monday, huh?"

"Yeah. Because by Monday they either have to start shooting scenes in which li'l Sally laughs, or else. So here I go."

Reilly Aztec said: "Got any more Bourbon?"

McNally handed over the flask. Reilly took a swallow, handed back the bottle, and went around to the gas pump. He turned the electric pump on, and put the hose in the tank. He pumped the tank full. Then he filled two five-gallon tanks, and stowed them in the trailer, along with McNally's equipment. He loaded a five-gallon tin of oil, and then went around back. The one-lunger stopped, and the lights went out; the air-conditioner warmed up.

Reilly Aztec came back, took the air conditioner down and put it in the office. He locked the office door, and took a carpenter's pencil out of his pocket, scrawled on white paint: *Back soon, maybe-so.* He climbed in next to McNally. "Let's go," he said.

McNally started the car.

"Pass the Bourbon," Reilly Aztec said. "And keep her slow. The road's rough, and climbs fast . . . I only bought this station because I didn't like white people, only now I know I don't like Indians, either. Maybe I'll like little hosses."

"Where you from?"

"Manhattan," Reilly said, swallowing. "And I don't mean Kansas. My old man was a herb doctor there."

As Reilly Aztec said, the road climbed fast. The station at Black Tourmaline had been sea-level or lower; but as they bounced along the rutty trail that passed for a road, the giant saguaro and the barrel cactus and the long, wand-like ocotillo of the desert became rarer and rarer, and they began to go through sage brush and greasewood and cascara land. Then, gradually, scrub oak and post oak and manzanita began to give warning that they were getting into timber country.

The car struggled, and McNally dropped to second gear and then to low gear, and they kept on going. Huge buttes rose out of the land around them, some of them capped with white limestone that gave the appearance, in the moonlight, of snow. Reilly Aztec rolled up his window; McNally reached behind him for a coat, and draped it over his shoulders.

White-faced cattle slept in humps beside the road; once they had to stop while a cow got up from her slumbers and rambled off. At intervals of a mile they would rattle over pipes set in the road; cattle guards to separate herds.

Now the road leveled out, and went along a table land. The chaparral brush was gone, and its place of rest of aspens, their trunks straight as ramrods, their leaves turning silver and dark alternately as the breeze of the car's passing hit them.

An hour passed. The car had made a little over ten miles.

"Gets better from here," Reilly Aztec said. "We're pretty near it. Twenty minutes."

McNally nodded. His hands on the steering wheel were icy cold, congealed. And then, without warning from his brain, his foot was pressing the brake down to the floor; the road ahead was not.

"Whata we do now?"

Reilly Aztec said: "Just drive on. It'll be okay."

McNally edged up to where the world ended; he stopped the car, and got out. The headlights sent twin beams out into eternity, to meet, focusing on nothing. McNally knelt and struck a match.

The road was still there. It just went downhill so abruptly that the lamps couldn't find it. McNally took a deep breath, climbing back into the car, and they rounded on the long hill in low, using both the motor and the brakes to hold the car back, the trailer hitch banging into McNally from behind and making it hard to steer.

The hill was so steep, the change so abrupt, that his hands were still stiff with cold when the sweat broke out on his face; and his stomach still had that tight, digestion-frozen ache when he started breathing with his mouth open because the heat had clamped down on his nose. "Gawsh, what a country."

Reilly Aztec said: "Yeah, an' double. You know something? We're about ten miles south of the last U. S. Customs office, and twenty, thirty miles north of the first Mexican one. That's what the good neighbors think of this bit of acreage."

"If it's this hot at Vandie Ricker's, we catch no dwarf horses. You can't herd horses at night. And you couldn't hunt in the daytime."

"We go up again to get into Ricker's, and it's all right there; about twenty-five hundred, and comfortable. I don't know about the canyon. I hear it's deep."

"There'll be water at the bottom, or the horses couldn't live there."

"Right." Reilly Aztec sighed. "Here we go up again."

They climbed, the moonlight bright and dimming their headlights, but neither man was watching the scenery now. Eventually they bumped their way over one final, car-shaking ridge, and slid down to a stop in front of a little cluster of buildings.

"Ricker's," Reilly said.

McNally nodded. He had felt tired back at Aztec's filling station, but he was exhausted now. He sat behind the wheel, studying the bleached board shacks.

A store, with Vandie Ricker's name on it and his license number as an Indian trader. Two gas pumps, with their prices on them—gas had gone up to fifty cents a gallon here. An ice house. A little mule shed and a corral in which two skinny horses and a fat burro blew dust. A flagpole, on which Ricker had left the tattered American flag up all night, in disregard of the law.

"I've seen worse," McNally said. "But still, I've got to keep remembering how much little Sally's employers offered me for the horses . . . C'mon, Reilly. Let's try and find Ricker."

He got out of the car and ambled over to the rickety porch. He pounded on the door. There was no answer. He pounded again.

Far in the back of the store someone lit a kerosene lamp; its feeble glow showed a dozen pigeon-holes for a post office, and shelf on shelf of canned goods and dry goods. A batch of saddles sat on horses. "Hey, Ricker," McNally yelled. "Let us in."

There was no answer. But the kerosene lamp moved a little, to show a shotgun being held just outside the door to the back room.

McNally yelled: "This is no time for horseplay and foolishness. Let us in!" He rattled the door down. "If you want to play hermit, save it for the weekend. Let us in or I'll take the store apart."

This got an answer, but not the answer McNally expected. A woman's voice said: "Go away this very instant, or I shall blast you with this rifle."

McNally peered through the glass again. The hand that held the gun could be a woman's; but the gun itself could not be a rifle. It was a shotgun.

He bawled: "I'm looking for Vandie Ricker. I sent him a wire I'd be here. My name's McNally."

The woman said: "Just a minute."

She was silhouetted for a moment in the door to the back room before she picked up her lantern and brought it with her. A long, bony silhouette in some sort of pajamas. Then she came to the front of the store, carrying the lantern in front of her; a sucker's trick if there was any shooting to be done.

The woman held the lantern to the dirty glass of the shop door and peered out. "Mr. McNally? Yes, yes. Let me see you aren't armed. Mr. Ricker was expecting you."

McNally held up his hands, grinning. The door opened to the creaking of rusty bolts and hinges and locks.

The woman set the lamp down on the ledge of the post office window. "How d'ye do," she said. She had the pseudo-British accent of the over-educated. "I'm Doctor Lawford. Mr. Ricker, I'm sorry to say, came down to the hospital in Ajo yesterday. Appendicitis. He was worried about his store, and I offered to come up and watch it for him."

McNally looked at her again. She was not as old as he had thought at first; not more than thirty, maybe younger. And she might not be bad looking if she had not had her nose pinched up superciliously, her lips compressed suspiciously.

"Ricker get my telegram?"

"It was in Ajo waiting for him. He never saw it; I left it with the floor nurse."

"Fair enough," McNally said. "I've got a man with me; we can do the work ourselves. You a doctor down at the hospital?"

The woman said: "No, I am connected with the Aboriginal Foundation. I have a grant of money to study the Indians."

There was a noise behind McNally and he turned. Reilly Aztec's face had that flat, blanket Indian look back on it that he had had when he had first met McNally.

"Ugh!" Reilly Aztec said.

Dr. Lawford's eye lit up. "Oh. What an interesting warrior! What's his name, McNally?"

"Me Winged Eagle," Reilly Aztec said. He slowly raised his right hand, placed it on the scholarly brow of Dr. Lawford. The brown hand passed down, stroking her cheek. It chucked her under the chin, then passed up the other cheek to the forehead again. There was no expression on Reilly Aztec's face. "You good squaw," he said. "Me tell easy by feel."

McNally groaned, and hurried out to the car to get himself a drink where the doctor couldn't see him. "I don't live right," McNally muttered to himself. "Admitting I don't live right at all, must I be punished this bad?"

III

McNALLY awoke at dawn. He moved his right leg out, stretching it carefully forward, then up. He moved his left leg in the same routine. He raised his arms over his head, caught hold of the edge of the counter on which he had slept, and pulled himself backwards, letting his legs drag. The cracking noises in his chest as his ribs stretched back into position were a pleasant assurance that he would feel better when he moved around a little.

He had slept on the counter. Dr. Lawford had the bedroom, and Reilly Aztec had slept out on the ground. "House for Injun like trap for coyote. Me sleep under Mother Moon an' li'l baby stars."

Everything Reilly had said the night before had been to the accompaniment of the soft whisper of a pencil in a notebook. Dr. Lawford was fascinated.

Reilly's motives were a mystery to McNally. Maybe the boy's queer sense of humor was urging him on to this Noble Redskin routine. And maybe he was on the make for Dr. Lawford. Reilly Aztec had not seen a white woman for some time, and the reservation squaws would not be appetizing dates for a New Yorker. Or—and most likely—Reilly had his eye on that Aboriginal Fund.

McNally, lying on the hard counter, didn't know, nor care. He had been born in a circus dressing tent and brought up in carnies and circuses. And he followed the outdoor showman's creed: Don't queer the other guy's pitch.

He moaned a little, and swung his legs to the floor. Stretching, he broke a can of coffee out of Ricker's stock, and went out in the rising sun.

It was chilly, with the tiniest, lightest mist in the world rising off the upland ground. McNally got his coffee pot and canned heat out of the car, found water dripping from a pipe over the horse trough, put coffee on to brew. A hen cackled in the little shed, and he wandered in there, found a couple dozen eggs hidden here and there in the sorted alfalfa. He collected them in his hat, and put them on the counter just inside the store; two of them he added to the water boiling for coffee.

He unlashed the cover of his trailer, and got out his fine linen and horsehair ropes. He tied one end of each rope to the corral rail, and stretched ropes tight to the bumper of the car. Then he broke open his eggs into a tin cup, poured himself some coffee, and ate breakfast, his cowboy Stetson tilted to the back of his head.

Afterward he pulled the ropes tight, went over them inch by inch. One linen rope had four, five chafed places in it. He crouched on his heels, staring at the heat waves rising off the bottom land.

He'd had that rope a long time. It had caught, on an underhand throw from a running board, one of the very last true, or mountain zebras ever to be collected. That was in the Cape of Good Hope country. It had hogtied a spotted hyena in the panther country for such time as it took McNally's Musselman boys to build a stout crate. It had been the snare in which the dingo had hung himself, the dingo that had killed three of McNally's duck-billed platypi in Australia.

Yeah, it had been a good rope. Slowly, McNally pulled out his knife and cut the rope into halter-lead lengths. He unraveled the parts that were gone, and used the strands to whip the ends of his halter leads. Then he sharpened the knife, drank another cup of coffee, and put two more eggs on to boil.

HE WALKED around the car to where Reilly Aztec was sleeping, wrapped in one of McNally's Hudson's Bay blankets. He stirred the boy with his toe. "Lo!" McNally said.

Reilly Aztec grunted. McNally stirred him more vigorously. "Lo!" he said again.

Reilly turned over on his back and opened his eyes cautiously. "Huh?"

"Lo, the poor Indian," McNally said. "He's gotta get up and go to work."

Reilly rubbed his face. "Nuts. What time is it?"

"About five-thirty. I want to get an early start; it may be too hot to work down in that canyon after nine, ten o'clock. Get going, boy."

Reilly Aztec got to his feet, grunting. "Hangover," he said. "That was the first whiskey I've seen in months. Say, how much you payin' me?"

"Ten a day," Dave McNally said. "Clear to L.A. That'll be sixty bucks."

"It's bus fare back to New York and a stake when I get there," Reilly said.

McNally said: "There's eggs boiling by the fire, there's coffee. There's a box of crackers. Get something into you, and let's get out of here."

"Check," Reilly said.

McNally went back to coiling his ropes. He found a pack saddle in the shed, but it was not in very good shape; he was busy thereafter in taking the latigos and cinch straps off it and replacing them with good leather he had brought along. Then he gave the burro a rubdown with an old piece of burlap, and blanketed and saddled him.

Reilly joined him, and they lashed a sack of rolled oats, brought by McNally, a sack of alfalfa taken from the shed; the ropes and a pile of gunny sacks onto the burro. They added a pair of pinch bars, two rifles, two big canteens. McNally got a little saddle leather kit out of the car, and put it on top. It contained an awl and waxed thread and leather for repairing boots; a first aid kit; antivenin for snakebite.

"All right, boy." McNally went to the car, and strapped on a .45 revolver and cartridge belt. He handed the burro lead to Reilly, and looked around.

A figure hitched across the dusty windows of the store. McNally strode up the porch to say goodbye to Dr. Lawford.

As he opened the door, the thin woman dropped the receiver back on the hook of an old-fashioned wall phone.

"Calling the hospital?" McNally asked.

Her white hand was pressed against her mouth, back to her lips. Why, she's afraid of me, McNally thought.

Then he remembered the gun on his belt. He laughed. "Scared of this, doc? I just put it on for snakes or gila monsters. Came to say goodbye. Reilly and I are going down the canyon now."

Her voice was shaking with the inexplicable terror. "Reilly?"

McNally remembered. "Winged Eagle."

"I think it's horrible," the woman said, her voice still shaking. "Horrible to victimize the Indians, to give them ridiculous names, to—"

"Yeah?" McNally grinned at her. "Reilly doesn't mind, lady. Ask him."

"He's got ten times the nobility of a white man. I think Indians are wonderful."

"Sure," McNally said. "Well, so long, lady. Be seeing you by noon, I hope. Or, if it's feasible and necessary, we'll camp down there tonight, be back tomorrow."

He went out, and joined Reilly, who was hazing the burro toward a trail. They walked uphill, slowly, toward the canyon wall.

Reilly Aztec said: "Old man Ricker dropped a pipe line down to the canyon floor one time. His windmill's hooked to it. I figure we can follow the pipe down."

"Oke," McNally said, lighting his pipe.

They walked along amicably, and they were nearly to the wall when McNally remembered the woman. He did not know whom she had phoned, or why; and he did not know what she was afraid of. And he had left his car there.

IV

BELOW them was the canyon. It was no Grand Canyon; you could fill your pipe, throw the empty tobacco tin down, and the noise of its landing would be back before you had the pipe lit. But neither was it one of the dinky little cracks in the hills that they call canyons around Los Angeles.

Below their feet the wall fell, at first glance, sheer away. At the top, the early morning sun painted the west wall, under them, a deep gold; the top of the east wall was gray, with yellow sandstone streaks. Then, down a third of the way, both walls were a deep, mysterious purple; and at the very bottom, green bloomed from the white stream rushing through the arroyo.

McNally said: "You can see a path down a little ways. Then—"

"We try it," Reilly Aztec said. "Ten bucks a day."

"Oke." They hazed the burro down. The path crossed and re-crossed Randie Ricker's waterpipe, and it was steep, but not too bad. It was chilly, and they moved along briskly.

Reilly led the burro, McNally drove him with a piece of brush. They rambled on down and now they were no longer level with the golden wall opposite; they were in the deep purple. It was warming up, but not unpleasantly so.

Once there was a little leak in the water pipe, with a patch of green weeds springing up around it. McNally stopped and plugged the leak with manila shredded off a pack-saddle rope. "Do old Ricker a favor."

"Yeah," Reilly said. "Say, Mac—"

It was the first time Aztec had called McNally by any name at all. "Yeah?"

"You think that dame's got much money from that foundation? That's the big museum up on Fifth Avenue in New York, you know."

McNally said he didn't think so. "Probably a thousand or so to finance her for a year. That's the way those things usually work. I did them a paper on Australian bushmen once, and they gave me thirty bucks. Of course, I hadn't applied for a grant."

"Me," Reilly said, "I'd like to go out on a lecture tour for 'em. Stay at some Injun lover's house, drink expensive wines, eat good food. That's for me."

"No expensive wines," McNally said. "People like that would know it's a Federal law not to give liquor to the Indians."

"That's right," Reilly said. He swung his machete, and cut away an ocotillo that had sprung up in a patch of sand where the wall made a little shelf. "Yeah. I'd have to be a Mex Injun, and they wouldn't care for that so much. All them Communist painters 'at come up from Mexico are Indians, and the act's been played out. I thought of being one of the kind that plays a tune on a little war-drum, and does a dance with a tommyhawk around the stage, then gives 'em a line about followin' the path of beauty."

"No liquor in it," McNally said. "And not much money. You'd have to be a noble redskin who called money by some quaint name—white man's buttons or something—and rose above it. No. You wouldn't like it any better than de-fleaing Pekes."

REILLY AZTEC turned suddenly and grabbed at McNally's gun. The showman was fast with his hands; but he had been, at the moment, hanging onto a hunk of root with one hand and waving the goad with the other. Reilly got his gun.

"This is it," McNally said. He swung his feet ready to kick out.

But Reilly Aztec had turned his back. The gun roared.

The Indian turned back. "Snake," he said. "Even so, McNally, I think I'll keep on kidding that dame. It's something to do in the evenin's. If we're gonna be up at that dump till Monday, I'll go nuts without somethin' to do."

McNally reholstered the revolver, and gulped a little. "We'll have to pull out by Saturday noon, probably. I figure on phoning for a horse truck Friday."

But his mind was jumpy, his hands a little unsteady. It was the first time he'd ever been out on a two-man trip where the other man was faster than he was. He didn't like it. Reilly Aztec was a simple, unassuming, embezzling son of nature; but he liked liquor, and he liked a joke. And it was not at all a good thing that he could out-manipulate McNally with his hands.

They kept on down. At nine o'clock they were distinctly hot; but also they were nearly at the bottom. When their feet or the burro's little hooves were not disturbing the peace, they could hear the water in the stream.

The trail got less and less steep, and then they were on the floor itself. McNally wiped sweat off his brow, and looked around.

It was not bad. Not bad at all. The floor of the canyon was not as badly littered with boulders as he had expected; the air was not too hot. McNally's watch said nine-thirty; if it was this cool at that late hour, they could get through the noon time by taking a siesta in the shade.

"We'll tie the burro," McNally said. "And work upstream looking for pony sign."

Reilly said: "You go. I'll wait for you here."

"Come on."

"No spikka Ingliss."

McNally stared at his helper for a minute. Then he shrugged, and started up the canyon floor.

Grass grew between boulders; tall, succulent weeds sprouted from the gravel in the stream bed. A horse could not have stayed alive down there, a steer would have gaunted, but a pony or a burro would have made out all right.

There could be ponies here.

There had been once; McNally had seen one that had been brought out from here. But animals have a trick of disappearing; they follow an underground river, or they get an epidemic germ, or they just melt into thin air.

He wandered upstream, threading a way through the boulders. It was easy going for a man with stout boots; and it was good horse trapping country, too. The round boulders, many of them ten and twelve feet in diameter, made natural corrals; McNally saw many a place where ten minutes' work with ropes and rocks would make a box into which the ponies could be driven.

And as for closing the entrance—a horse never looks up. They would go right by a man perched on top of the boulder. When they were in, all he would have to do was drop down and guard the entrance.

Oh, easy. If the little horses were there.

McNally opened his shirt against the increasing heat. Once he stopped and took a dip, with all his clothes on, in a backwater of the canyon stream; afterward he had fifteen minutes of chill from evaporation.

When that wore off, he looked around for another pool; the stream itself ran too fast to be trusted. Here the canyon floor was divided down the middle by a bulwark of rocks and half-rotted tree trunks; he climbed over, and saw, on the other side, a backwater edged by tall green reeds.

Where there are reeds, there must be still water. He slid down the bulwark, and saw a fine pool; maybe three feet deep, ten feet long. In the shadow of a rock, he slid out of his clothes, and into the water, floated on his back.

Ten thousand dollars to get these horses, and a lead-pipe setup like this. Easy trapping, a trail that didn't have to be worked over to get the ponies up, and a climate that was not bad at all. Boy, oh, boy! He stood up, scrubbed his body with sand, and plunged forward on his face, kicking with his heels.

His outstretched hands hit a rock, and he opened his eyes. And there, directly under his eyes, was a hoof-mark on the bottom of the pool—a tiny hoof-mark under the water.

McNALLY stood up, water dripping off him, and studied. A little horse had come here to drink. He waded out, and inspected the reeds. Some of them had been carelessly cropped off, as if an animal who was not hungry had taken a bite after drinking.

His pulses throbbed. Hard luck and a narrowing market had given him plenty of tough luck lately; maybe this was the beginning of a lucky streak. He climbed into his clothes; and before putting his boots on, soaked the cloth to keep him cool. Then he put on his boots and his gun, and took up the trail, going along bent over, tracking.

There had been five of the little horses. They were not, as Reilly Aztec had said, ponies; their hoofs were not round, but horse shaped; just smaller.

And they had not kept to the main canyon, but had gone up a side cut. A smooth, redstone arroyo. It was funny; because as he went along, first the vegetation and then the water ceased. Not the sort of place you would expect a horse to go. Nothing to eat.

McNally, who had tracked a thousand horses in his day, put his mind in theirs. Why, sure. They had come up here to sleep! There was no place in the main wash smooth enough for a little horse to lie down. And a horse—particularly a wild horse—can sleep standing up for just so long. Three, four days. Then he finds a smooth spot, and lies down on his side and sleeps, sometimes for twenty-four hours.

McNally had found the horses' bedroom.

Now the sandstone floor of the arroyo had gotten so hard and smooth that he could no longer find hoof marks to follow. He straightened up and stopped, gasping.

The geological formation had changed completely. The time had changed, the setting had changed. He was no longer in the Shoshone Canyon of southwestern Arizona in 1941.

He was in the prehistoric ages, in some horrid cairn of Central Asia where dinosaurs and flying monsters laired. He was in a movie producer's idea of Hell. He was—

McNally stood stock still, his hand on his gun, and stared, cowering a little.

THIS arroyo rose sheer to the sky, with the top edges seeming to bow toward each other and hem the world in. The cliffs were of blood-red sandstone, granular and brilliant; no direct sun penetrated this far down, but some reflected from one wall to the other, and made the red stone glow.

Deposits of gypsum and borax broke the walls; sheets and threads and chunks of the soft chemical rock, weathered to incredible shapes and sizes. Directly ahead of him was one piece of selenite, ten feet long, with a sawtooth top and a transparency that allowed him to look right through it, to see the sandstone behind it distorted, wavering, but visible.

The sheet was not more than five inches thick, and yet it stood there. The stone floor in front of it was stained where the chemical had melted away in the infrequent rains of this desert world.

Ahead of McNally the arroyo twisted into almost a right angle. He stood there, a dwarfed figure in a cowboy hat and high boots, hand on his impotent gun, and he was afraid to go ahead. He, Dave McNally, the toughest guy in the expedition and amusement business, found himself shaking.

His eyes smarted, and he told himself that was from the chemicals that dusted off the gypsum and borax and got on his sweating forehead to run into his eyes. Sure.

"Barnum'd go on," he muttered. "Th' Martels'd go on. Frank Buck'd go on. I'm gonna go on."

But he wished Reilly Aztec had come with him. With someone to talk to, this would just be an interesting place to photograph.

He began to whistle at the top of his palate. There was only one tune to whistle. *The Merry-go-Round Broke Down.* Sure. But he was going to fix it up. He was going to go round that bend, and follow those little horses, and—

His heavy boots went clump, clump, keeping time for him as he marched up on that corner in Hell, whistling as loud as he could. *Oh, the merry-go-round broke down, but you don't see me frown—*

He rounded the corner. There was nothing to scare a man in the wispy beard of white chemical that the rocks shed. Nothing at—

Oh, the merry—

He stopped whistling, and whirled on his heel, his gun out, ready. Someone behind him had taken up the tune, one bar behind him. Someone was whistling rounds with him.

Then he laughed, and his hard, brittle laughter came back to him, a dozen times, from behind, from ahead. Sure. If you turn a sharp corner in a steep rock canyon, you walk past an echo. And if there is another sharp corner ahead of you, why, it's an echo, too. Let's go, McNally.

He kept his head up, and he tramped ahead, but he did not whistle now. He was still and the only noise was the tramp, tramp of his boots, and the tramp, tramp, tramp of the ghost army that marched with him, the army of echoes.

Ten grand, and the light in Little Sally's eyes as she sees her merry-go-round. The grand, and the gratitude of a producer who might well shoot an animal picture next week or month or year.

Ten grand, and who's afraid of the big bad echo? Not McNally.

V

McNALLY rounded three of the awful bends; he rounded four, and then he and his ghost army stopped marching. At his feet was horse sign, still warm. Ponies ahead. He forgot about the ghastly red-and-white rock formations, forgot the echoes, forgot the sweat that hurt his eyes, and went ahead faster. He whistled again, but between his teeth this time, so that it threw no echo.

He found a couple more bends, and the pony sign got thicker, and he was no longer aware of the rocks that threatened him. He knew what was ahead now—ponies. Not dinosaurs, not megasaurs or vampire bats, but good, honest little horses to pull a screen star on her laughing way.

When the voice called him back, he didn't even notice. It cried: "Come back," and it cried it from behind him, but McNally had been fooled by that echo before, and he was not going to fall for it again. He kept on.

"Come back, before it's too late!"

McNally wiped sweat from his face, and plucked his drenched shirt away from his chest. You can't fool me, little old echo. I'm too—

He stopped dead, and turned in his track. The heat was getting him. Because there couldn't be an echo, not in the deepest, sheerest canyon in the world, unless there was a voice to start the echo. And he hadn't said a word!

He pulled his revolver, and started back. Then he laughed, and again ghosts laughed back at him from all sides.

Reilly Aztec! The kid had known this canyon was here, had known it was where the ponies bedded. He had pretended to sulk, to hang back so he could follow McNally and play this joke on him.

McNally called: "Hey, Reilly!" The canyon answered him: "Ly-Rei, Ly-Rei, Reilly!"

"Come on, Reilly," McNally called. "The ponies are up ahead, and we'll make our roundup and be back to Ricker's tonight."

There was no discernible answer. The echoes took that speech and twisted it up so, threw such fantastic chunks of it around, that it was impossible to tell if new words were being thrown into that mess of sound.

McNally sat down on a hunk of sandstone that was weathered to the shape of a toadstool, and waited.

The echoes died down, and now there was no noise at all. McNally uncoiled the rope he had brought with him, and flicked it out onto the sandstone floor of the arroyo, played with it. He waited for Reilly.

No Reilly appeared. Well, if that phoney Injun wanted to play little jokes, let him. Just so he was back there, that was enough. His presence—the strange presence of a man—in the narrow gut would stop the ponies if they started back. And McNally could dock the Aztec ten bucks for a day's work, on account of insubordination.

Dave McNally stood up, and walked ahead. And when the voice called behind him: "Come back, back before it is too late," he disregarded it.

But it was funny that Reilly's voice came clear and unrepeated, that there was no echo with it . . .

McNally rounded one more bend, and stopped, grinning. Ahead of him was his quarry.

LITTLE horses. Two dozen or more little horses! They ranged from almost black to buckskin, with fine sorrels and bright bays in between. Not a pinto in the lot, and that was fine; a pinto would look like a misshapen Shetland.

McNally stood there, twirling his rope to block the canyon, and tried to sort the horses out in his mind. Let's see. He wanted eight—because the other little merry-go-round had had seven—little horses of the same color. Well matched.

His contract didn't call for it, but he wanted to give extra value. Let's see. Three buckskins. So buckskins were out, though he might take them along to fill up the car. Only two blacks. Sorrels. Now, there were plenty of sorrels, and—

His hat flew off his head. Something . . .

He stepped backward, picked it up, not turning his back on the herd. A stone had dented the crown of the Stetson.

McNally ducked behind a rock and waited. Reilly

Aztec—or someone was ahead of him. On the other side of the pony herd.

He studied the horses' bedroom. It was the very end of this twisting arroyo, a sort of box canyon off the main canyon. A little spring bubbled up at the end, at the foot of the sandstone wall, ran a few feet, and disappeared into the ground again. And the space was wide and round, a sort of circle perhaps a hundred feet in diameter, with McNally standing in the only opening.

McNally got behind his rock, and called: "It's all right, pal. You can heave rocks at me if you want. I've got a gun, and the gun's got sic—no, five—bullets in it, and you don't get out until I tell you you can."

He smiled to himself. He almost laughed. He had been afraid of ghosts, and then someone had thrown a stone at him. Ghosts don't throw stones. Men throw stones, and men have a great advantage over ghosts: you can shoot men with a .45 revolver.

McNally waited.

Again the voice cried: "Come back, back, back," but McNally didn't turn his head. Sure. A guy could be in front of you and throw his voice at the right rock, and the voice would come out behind you. Nothing to it.

McNally scorned himself for having been afraid before, but that was over. No use crying about it now.

The horse herd moved restlessly, and milled, like range cattle. McNally had never seen horses mill before. All of a sudden a little buckskin stallion whistled, and reared, and then put his small head down between his hooves, bucked once, and charged for the opening.

McNally's rope whistled, and the end of it flicked the little stud in the face. The horse whirled, faster than light, and charged back into the herd, whickering nervously. He buried himself in the middle of the other horses, safe from the strange, invisible sting that had hurt his tender nose.

Oh, they'd be a cinch to break and train. That ten grand—minus expenses—was in the bag.

But first something had to be done about the lug who hid behind the horses, and called things at McNally.

The showman listened to those things for the first time in minutes. "Back, back, come back. The ghost of Redrock Canyon orders you back, back, back!"

There was a timing, a cadence to the chant that would have terrified a superstitious man. But McNally was not superstitious. He was—

Why, hell, he was a showman, and so was the guy who was doing the hollering. That yelling was timed, spaced, by someone who had once learned to handle an audience.

McNALLY stood up, and ducked the first rock that came over. "Cease firing," he called. "I'm an agent from the big time! I'm out booking acts for a presentation! You wanta bean me before I get you signed up?"

The ghostly, fearful voice chanted: "Four a day or six a day?"

McNally called back: "Six a day with a road show, but they pay traveling expenses," and then amazed at the background, the setting, and the conversation, broke out into helpless, destroying laughter. He rolled behind his rock, on the powdery sandstone floor, and howled, holding his sides.

Tears streamed down his face and washed the punishing borax out of his eyes. His ribs ached, and his stomach nearly collapsed with laughter.

When he finally got control of himself, the ghost voice boomed: "You're not crazy, are you? Vaudeville's dead."

"Maybe I'm crazy, but I'm on the level, boy," McNally said. "It's just—"

"What office are you from?"

This was business, this was serious. McNally named his own agent. "Jake Loeb, New York. I'm Dave McNally."

"I've heard of you," the ghost said. "It's a fine thing when they have to get out an explorer to go book the best ventriloquist on the old Keith time."

"Sure it is," McNally said. "Come on down here and let's talk terms. I can't leave because I have to hold these horses in the cup here."

"That's what I want to talk about," the ghost said, and appeared.

HE WAS a thin guy, about six feet but looking much taller because he was so emaciated. A straggly gray-and-brown beard covered his chin, and dangled to his breast-bone. He was wearing a Chimayo cloth coat that was in pretty good repair—but Chimayo never wears out—and a pair of pants that seemed to be made of two burlap sacks.

He came from behind a rock at the spring; and McNally had never known the rock was there, it was so much the same color as the back wall. He carried a huge manzanita-wood slingshot in one hand, and helped himself along with an aspen cane.

Just as he stood, he would have packed them in in a fortune-telling act in the beach towns. "That's what I want to talk about," the ventriloquist said. "The horses. I have grown very attached to them. It will be necessary for me to take them with me on tour."

McNally tried to visualize a vaudevillian who insisted on taking a dozen ponies on the road with him. He couldn't, but then nothing fazed McNally. "Sure," he said. "Sure. Let's herd them up and get going. They're holding up bookings for you."

It was essential that he not ask the man's name. He was supposed to have made this trip, come to this hell-hole to book him. Therefore he must know him. And it was also essential—McNally's brain clicking the facts into line like an adding machine—that the man not know his horses were going to be sold to a little child actress.

"Can you make the ponies follow you?" McNally asked. "Back to my pack outfit? I left my fountain pen there, and we want to get our contract into writing as soon as possible."

"Of course they'll follow me," the ventriloqust said. "Easiest thing in the world. I just throw my voice behind them, to the side of them, any place I want to. I could do it without these echoes: the Great Marino can throw his voice at will. And with the walls—ha!"

"Ha!" McNally said.

"Young man, I have spent five years studying these walls. I know every one of those tricks."

"I was sure that Marino could beat a thing like that in five months," McNally said gravely. "And with five years—ha!"

"Ha," Marino answered. "But please—not Marino. I insist on my full billing. The Great Marino!"

"The Great Marino it is," McNally said. "Come on, Great Marino. Oh, wait. Maybe I better go ahead." He wanted to get to Reilly Aztec, tell the bum to keep his mouth shut. One word about the merry-go-round, and this old crackpot would be off, and the horses with him.

"No, McNally," Marino said. "You walk with me. I wish to discuss details for the booking. Costume. Billing. Stabling for my friends here. Let us go, McNally. Coil that stupid rope of yours, and watch the Great Marino herd horses."

"Oke, Great Marino," McNally said. He would have to take his chances on Reilly Aztec. The bum had never yet failed to say the wrong thing at the wrong time, but maybe this would be an exception.

Ah, well. Things had been too easy so far. You have to expect a little trouble.

VI

THE Great Marino was right; he could herd those horses like Gary Cooper and Joel McCrea with Gene Autry helping them. All he had to do was throw his voice; the horses shied away from it. And Great Marino knew every knob and bump in the canyon; he could get a single echo, a double echo or a rolling echo at will. The little horses went along in a compact bunch.

"How come you to live down here?" McNally asked.

"Alimony," the ventriloquist said, sepulchrally. "I was playing Tucson when she caught up with me. Vandie Ricker was in the bar when I ducked out to save taking the papers. He told me about this canyon."

"Ricker's in the hospital," McNally said. "Appendicitis."

"A good man," the actor said. "Yes . . . I've done some silver work, mounted some bits of agate I found in the canyon for him; he's kept me in groceries. But the little horses, they have been my friends." His ghostly voice shot ahead of them, to check the herd. "I could not be separated from them."

They were coming downstream faster than McNally had gone up. And it was later in the morning. The heat down here was terrific. McNally would drop out from time to time to duck into pools, without even bothering to take his boots off; the leather was getting a doughy rotted look already.

They drove on. The ventriloquist's voice was all around him, but he didn't heed it; just stumbled along.

It was eleven when they hit the pipe line and Reilly Aztec.

McNally knew it first when Marino shook his arm. "Man ahead," the old actor was mumbling.

"Phoney," McNally said. "Phoney. Mirage. Illusion."

But the hand shook him harder, and harder, and McNally opened his eyes. His hands were swollen and cracked from the heat, his wrists and temples felt as though they would burst from the pressure of expanding pulses. He wondered dimly how long Marino had been shaking him.

"Gotta—" McNally muttered. "Gotta—" He was aware of Marino taking him to the stream, helping him into it. The current tugged at him, the icy water chilled him, and his brain started to work again. He got out of the water, shivering.

"Why, man," the ventriloquist said, "this isn't hot. Wait till July, August."

McNally said: "I can't wait." Then he laughed. "That's my helper ahead. He's all right. My guide. A friend of Ricker's. Hold the horses here, and I'll go talk to him."

"I'll go along," Marino said.

McNally looked at him. "Suspicious, aren't you?"

The ventriloquist smiled. Together, they went up, Marino pushing the horses into a side wash with his voice, permitting McNally to make a rope gate at the entrance to the wash to hold them there.

McNALLY went forward, shook Reilly Aztec's arm. The Indian was asleep under a thorn bush, on his stomach, his head pillowed on his arms. He didn't move. A little distance away, the burro grazed, still loaded. McNally frowned, stood up. He poked Reilly with the tip of a toe. "Wake up, buck. Wake up!"

The Indian groaned, and didn't move. "Sunstroke, or heat exhaustion," McNally muttered. "We've got to get him out of here."

The Marino said: "I never heard of an Indian suffering from the heat."

"He's not an Indian. Just a phoney."

"Oh."

McNally was brisk now, his own heat exhaustion thrust aside. "Help me unpack the burro. We'll strap Reilly on his back, get him up the hill. We'll nose and tail the little horses behind the burro, and we'll all be out in an hour. It's faster going up a trail like that than down. We won't have to worry about the burro falling."

His hands were busy unlashing the pack. "Take this pile of ropes. I'll show you how to tie the little horses. Going up the trail this way will break them at the same time it gets them out; they'll be almost ready to use when we get to the top—"

When no hand closed on the pile of rope he held out, he looked up. Marino was just standing there. "McNally?"

McNally said: "Step on it, man. I'm gonna give Reilly here some medicine to hold him, but he ought to go to a hospital and—"

"McNally, I can't go."

McNally stared.

"Huh?"

"I'm afraid. I've been here so long." The deep booming tones of the actor had cracked. This was just the whining of an old man. "The world. People are different. . ."

McNally was thinking about Reilly Aztec. "All right, old man. Stay down here. I'll come back some time and talk to you about it. But you'll help me hitch up the little horses, won't you?"

"Horses?"

McNally was swabbing Reilly Aztec's arm with iodine. Bent over, he plunged the hypodermic needle into the Indian's arm, giving him medicine to take care of him until he could be gotten to a doctor. Over his shoulder, he said: "The horses, sure the horses. That I came for. It's too dangerous"—he withdrew the empty needle, dropped it back into the medicine chest—"to make another trip down here for them. I want to get them out today. Just tie these ropes to their necks and—"

Something hit him on the back of the neck. Only the fact that he had just moved to shift Reilly kept the staff from cracking his head. He glanced up, reaching for his gun.

The Great Marino had gone wild. "You tricked me. You tried to trick me! It's not me you were after, but my little horses. You wanted to steal my horses and—"

McNally ducked and rose. The old man was circling around, waving his aspen cane.

McNALLY stepped back, one hand on his gun. And then something happened to him that he had heard about, read about, but had never seen happen before. He saw himself, his life. Not the early part, when he'd just been a punk, talking in front of other men's pitches in carnivals, showing off other men's animals in circus acts, even doing a talk-dance act in vaudeville. But the part since he'd grown up, the years of tramping the jungles, the veldts, the bazaars, the mountains for acts.

Animals. Using a gun when he had to use a gun. Driving men on through malaria country and precipice country and overseas, to get his animals back to the United States.

He was not wealthy, but he wasn't in need of coffee money, either.

He said: "T'ell with it. Keep your horses." He heaved Reilly Aztec up on the burro, lashed him tight, threw a water-soaked burlap over him, and picked up a short rope to haze the burro. "So long."

The old man still circled him cautiously as he started for the trail up. "Yeah," McNally said, "I wanted the horses. I was offered a lot of money for eight canyon dwarf horses in Hollywood. They would have been famous, they would have had their pictures in all the papers." He hit the burro with the rope. "Get along, mule."

The trail started up, and they made the first crossing of Vandie Ricker's waterpipe, but the old man still circled cautiously around McNally, fearing a trick. "The horses would have been well cared for. Beautifully cared for. They would have slept in good stalls and gotten good feed, and they would have lived longer than they will here."

The old man had some boom, some oomph back in his voice. "You tricked me, you tried to trick me."

"Sure," McNally said. "Only I'm on the level. I've killed men in my time—because they wanted to kill me, or because they couldn't stand the work they hired on to do, and died of overwork—but I keep my word. I'd've gotten you bookings. I'd've fixed it so you could live with your little horses when you weren't on the road. But I'm being a sap."

The old man's breath was coming hard. "You wanted to steal my horses."

"Ah, shut up," McNally said. "All of a sudden I'm tired of crackpots and screwballs. This phoney Indian here—I could leave him in the shade down there, and take care of you, talk to you. Give me time, and I can talk anybody out of anything. I'm McNally!

"And it's his own dopey fault. He stole a bottle of whiskey out of my car, was drinking it down there in the sun. I could smell when I bent over him. I ought to leave him to take his chances. Or sock you, and take the horses I need.

"You're a crackpot, and it seems to me a guy making a legitimate living like me has a right to take a sock at a crackpot. You don't need all those horses, and I just wanted eight sorrels. But so long. I'm a sucker, but this guy might die if I stayed to rope up those ponies or to argue with you, so so long."

He raised the short end of the rope, cracked the burro. "Get up the trail, li'l old mule. And so long, Marino, you screwball."

The burro climbed, and they were out of the sun now, and out of the little patch of dampness in the bottom of the canyon. The old man wailed something threatening and confused, and then dropped back.

The burro's heels rung as he crossed the pipe line again, and he seemed to drag. Reilly Aztec's prone form moved slightly on the donkey's back. McNally let half a cup of water from the big canteen fall on the sacking over Reilly's face, and hit the burro with the rope. "Get along, li'l dogie."

Under him, the dwarf horses and bearded old crackpot were getting dwarfed with distance.

VII

ABOUT the climb up, there wasn't much that stayed in McNally's mind later. Awful, burning, baking heat without sun, heat that came not directly, but reflected off canyon walls and floor, that enveloped him. This was worse than the rays of the Arizona sun, because it penetrated under the shadows of rocks and bushes; there was never any respite from it, any time when it was better or worse.

It was everywhere, and constant.

His boots cracked from it, after the soaking he'd given them in the canyon floor. His head reeled from it; he'd been a sick man before he'd discovered Reilly Aztec passed out.

It occurred to him, clear as if it were written on a rock in letters of fire, that the movie company that employed Little Sally could have sent out a location scout and two horse wranglers and gotten the horses considerably under ten thousand dollars. In October, in November, or any time before May.

He had been offered all that money because the producer had known that it was hell in Shoshone Canyon in June. Had known that McNally would get no help. They had paid him for his knowledge of animals, sure. But knowl-

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edge of horses is much more common than knowledge of tigers or coatumundis or whales.

The money had been for the McNally guts, the McNally reputation. That canyon, with its soothing, lulling heat of dawn, its murderous baking of a few hours later had been his match.

"Get along, little mule," McNally said, and threw the first canteen away. He dropped half a teacup of water over Reilly Aztec's face, and one drop spilled on McNally's finger. He licked it off eagerly, anxiously. "Get along, little mule."

And it had licked him. No common decency, but head-madness had made him let those horses go when he'd once had them.

Get along, little mule.

SOME weary time later—it was still well before noon, but McNally couldn't know—the burro brayed and put on speed, and they were over the rim. Then they were walking down to Vandie Ricker's station, McNally and his burro; or the burro was walking—McNally was staggering.

He was aware that there were two or three cars parked around the station, besides his own, but he didn't care. He saw men unstrapping Reilly Aztec, and then he saw only the gloomy dusk inside the store, and staggered for it. The dark shadows slid up along his legs and his body, and then covered his face, and he was cool again. He lay down under the counter.

Maybe it was five minutes, maybe five hours, before he awoke. It was a woman's voice: "I see no reason to keep that poor Indian here until your prisoner is ready to travel. Winged Eagle ought to go to the hospital. At once!"

And a man's voice: "Lady, the Injun's gonna be all right. That bootlegger saved his life, anyway. Giving him the shot and rushing him up here was the thing to do."

The thin voice of the woman was triumphant. "Then you admit he's a bootlegger."

The man said: "Sure. Sure. There was liquor on the Injun's breath even when we got him. That guy must have made a flying trip up the canyon."

"You sound as if you admire him." The woman was Dr. Lawford.

"Lady, don't be so tough. The guy was giving liquor to the Indian for money. He's not a regular bootlegger. That outfit of his in the trailer's worth a couple of thousand, and he only had two bottles of whiskey in the car. Maybe he didn't even know it's against the law to give liquor to Indians."

McNally held his breath. This was it. This was the works. No ponies, a mediocre case of sunstroke, and then a year in a Federal pen for bootlegging on an Indian Reservation. Oh, lucky McNally, oh, fortunate McNally. Buffalo Dave McNally, the King of the Golden West.

The great McNally lay under his counter, and tried to figure an out. Reilly Aztec was not, of course, an Indian in the legal sense of the word. And a swell time McNally would have proving it. The New Yorker had taken advantage of his Indian appearance to get free schooling over in the Western Navajo Reservation; he would be registered there as an Indian, and to deny his aboriginality here would get him in jail over there. And Reilly was no man to go to jail as a favor to McNally or anyone else.

If I could get to the phone and call Jake Loeb in New York, he'd fly me a lawyer who could talk me out of it. If that dinky one-wire forestry phone has a long-distance hookup which it hasn't.

Well, then, let them take me in, and I'll phone Jake from the U. S. marshal's office. Only—

Only, McNally had been going out on expeditions for a great many years. And he had never yet come back empty-handed. Oh, he hadn't always gotten what he went after; he'd brought back cats when he wanted llamas, and a gorilla when he'd started out for an African village act; but he'd never been whitewashed.

And without the horses, he would be a joke. There wasn't another blinking thing for miles around worth exhibiting.

He hated to have Jake Loeb get the laugh on him. He'd never hear the end of it. McNally getting soft-hearted, and letting ten grand worth of horses loose because he didn't want to conk an old man.

Dr. Lawford had been moving around the back room. Now dishes rattled. "There's your lunch, Marshal. And right after you eat it, I expect you to take Winged Eagle to the hospital. And that man to jail!"

The marshal said: "Lady, lady. After I eat, I take a siesta. And that poor guy doesn't go to jail till after dark. You want him to get sick from the sun?"

"I don't care. There is nothing more despicable than a white man who will sell liquor to the Indians!" The front door slammed.

The marshal muttered: "These Injun lovers the museums send out here!" and then made a good deal of noise chewing up his lunch.

McNALLY got his legs and arms under him, and started creeping along the back of the counter. He got to the bedroom door and pulled up enough to look around the edge of the counter. The marshal was a stout bald man; he was sitting in front of the post office window in the deepest shade, with his back to McNally.

McNally got a hand up, opened the bedroom door, and slipped through. Then he got to his feet and stood swaying; spots danced before his eyes. Gradually the blood drained from his head; but when he faced the window, the sun outside blinded him. He looked at his watch. Only two; he hadn't slept so long after all.

He slid the sun-warped window open with as little noise as possible, and dropped out.

Now. He could put his feet under him and move them, and walk west, toward the California line and comparative freedom. While the charge against him was Federal, the marshal's whole speech and bearing indicated that he wasn't going to go to a lot of trouble to bring McNally back; he was acting because that Lawford woman would get his job if he didn't.

Yeah, McNally could walk to California. A hundred miles, more or less. With the temperature, in spots, a hundred and twenty, a hundred and fifty. A nice cool cell in Leavenworth had it all over that plan.

And besides, the country was so open they could spot him in an instant from a car. And he didn't dare touch his own car. He—

He crept around the house. There was only one place to go. Back down into the canyon. Hide out with the Great Marino, a pair of fugitives from a couple of petit larceny laws. An Indian bootlegger and an alimony fugitive.

But, by Gargantua, if he ever went down that canyon again, he would talk Marino out of those horses. He would come up and he would have ten thousand dollars' worth of little dwarf horses, and t'ell with Dr. Lawford.

If you want something done, do it yourself. If he'd never taken Reilly Aztec down with him, he never would have had to hurry back, and he could have put on a sales talk. So here he went for the second trip.

A little voice inside McNally's head told him another trip down into that oven today might kill him. But he laughed at the little voice. He was McNally, and if he had been going to die, it would have happened years ago.

He crept around the house. And then he stopped.

DR. LAWFORD was asleep in a hammock slung from one corner of Ricker's store to a tamarack tree. Sound asleep, her skinny hands folded on her skinny bosom. Her skinny legs in her sleazy slacks neatly crossed at the ankles.

Asleep.

A devil, an imp born of the sun, was born in McNally's brain.

Cautiously, quietly, he crept to the marshal's car. There, there it was, on the floor in back: the evidence. The remaining two quarts of bourbon.

McNally uncorked one, and tilted it up, and the thirsty Arizona sand took half the evidence. He uncorked the other, and poured out some whiskey. But not all. No, not all. He saved a nice, juicy pint.

Cautiously, quietly, he crept up on the hammock. And then one hand came down on the woman's mouth, pressed her firmly back into the hammock. The other hand raised the bottle.

The eyes over his hand were wide with fear. McNally laughed, and he hoped there was a good fiendish quality to the laugh. He poured the whiskey slowly, firmly on her head; he drenched her hair with it. He heard his own voice laughing, and then let her go. The bottle was empty, and the case against him was pretty well messed up.

The woman dashed at him furiously. McNally raised his voice, his tough voice that had advertised a dozen sideshows. "Hey, Marshal!" he yelled. "Hey, cop!"

The stout man came charging out of the store, his shirt open, the top button of his trousers loose, ready for his siesta. "Help, help," McNally screamed. "This dame's drunk and attacking me!"

"I am not drunk," Dr. Lawford yelled. "I'm—"

But McNally had the edge on her in volume. "Drunk as a lord," he yelled. "She reeks like a distillery."

The marshal caught Dr. Lawford's elbows from behind. "Phew," he said. "Why, doctor."

The sun beat down on all of them. But it beat down most, it seemed, on the whiskey-drenched hair. You could have smelled it in San Francisco. "I'm not drunk," the doctor said. But she said it feebly.

"Drunk and fighting," McNally said. "They'll like this when they hear about it at your foundation."

The marshal let the woman go. And then, suddenly, tears came into that hard face. "You wouldn't—my career—"

But Buffalo Dave McNally rode again. He said: "No. I'd never queer another guy's pitch. Of course I won't tell your bosses. Forget it. Go sleep it off."

The woman was staring at him strangely. She said: "But—"

"You see," McNally said, "what can happen. Listen. That mug asleep in the ice house isn't an Indian. He maintains he's half Aztec, but he was born in New York. Only you were going to push a complaint against me for giving him liquor, and with your standing, I'd have been in a jam I never would have heard the end of. Still going to sign the complaint?"

She shook her head. "No. I—"

"Forget it," McNally said. "I'm busy. I've got to go back down the canyon again."

Dr. Lawford said: "Why?"

"As soon as it's dark," McNally said, "I can sell that old crackpot down there on bringing his horses up and going to L. A. with me."

"What old—"

McNally said: "I forgot. You don't know about him. An aged ventriloquist who lives down there; and if that isn't one for Ripley, I'll eat the canyon. I just thought of an argument that'll bring him out of there like a bullet out of a gun."

"What's that?" the marshal asked. "Or are we all crazy?"

"I'm not," McNally said. "I'm taking a portable radio down with me. Charlie McCarthy's on tonight, and when that old screwball hears the buildup they give Bergen, he'll be crazy to get to the nearest broadcasting station."

McNally walked to the car, started getting up a new pack for the burro.

"I may not know much," McNally said. "But I know actors."

His head still ached from the sun, but it didn't matter. He wasn't going home empty-handed, and that was all that mattered.

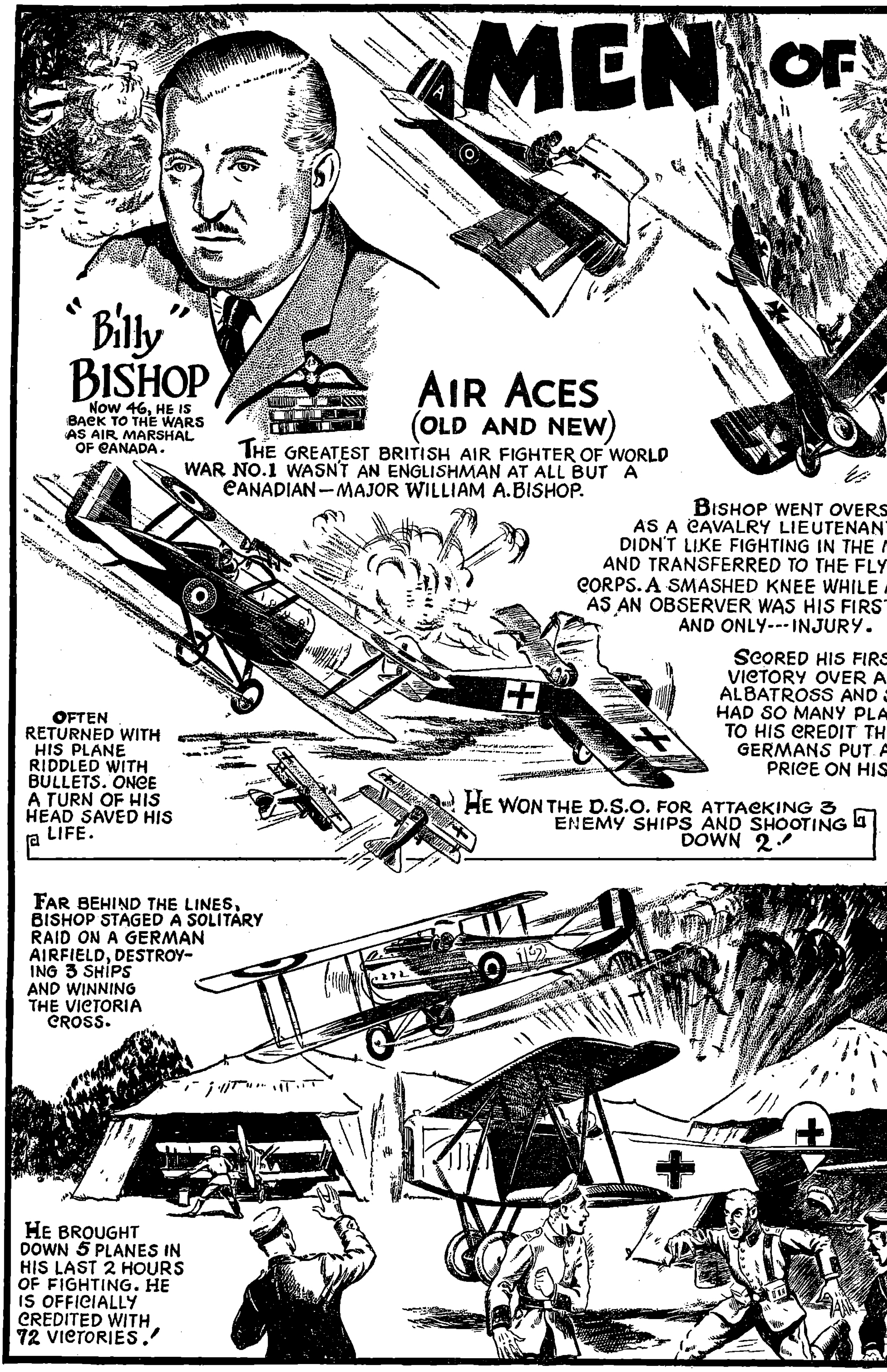
Happy Relief From Painful Backache

Many of those gnawing, nagging, painful backaches people blame on colds or strains are often caused by tired kidneys—and may be relieved when treated in the right way.

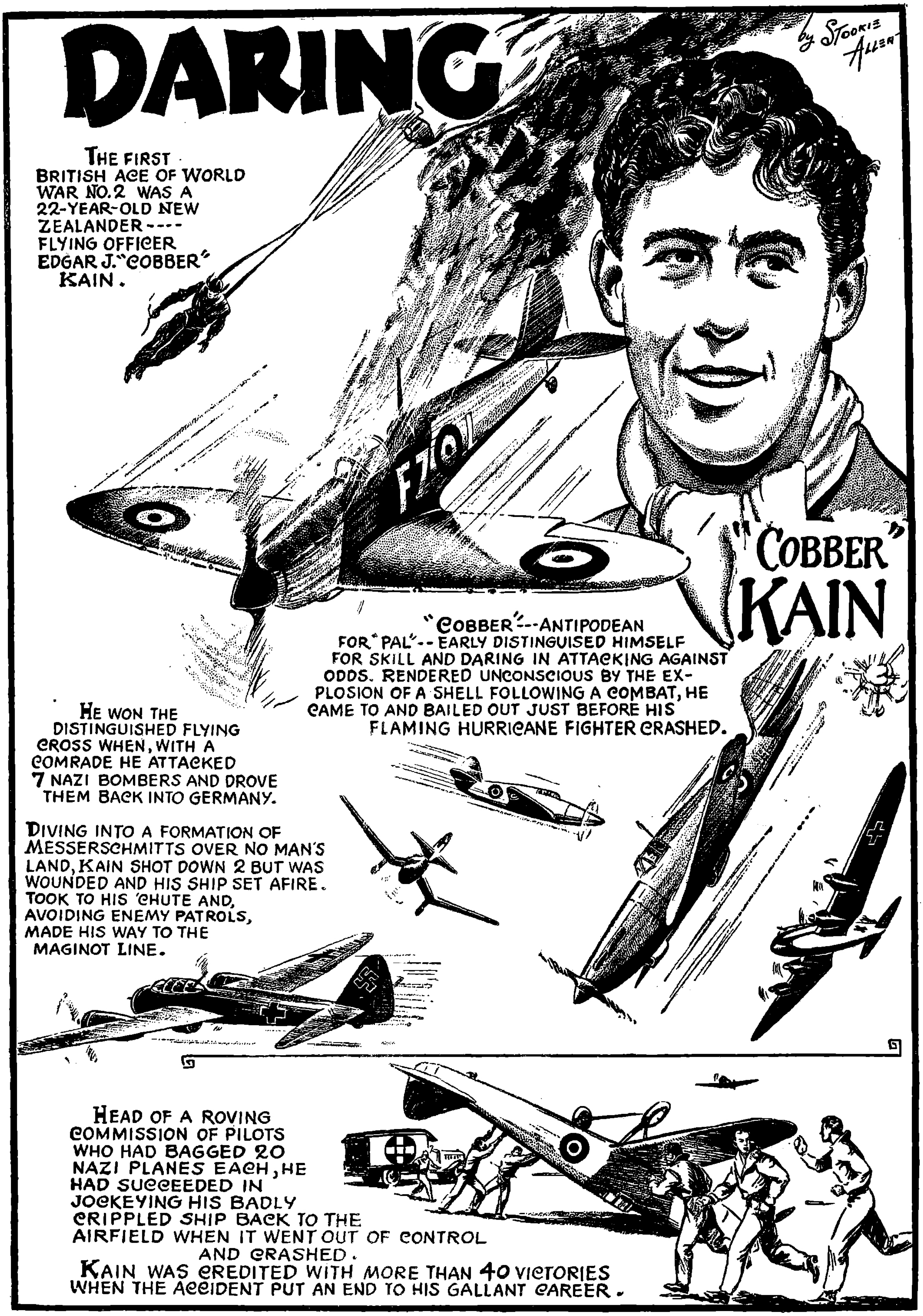
The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

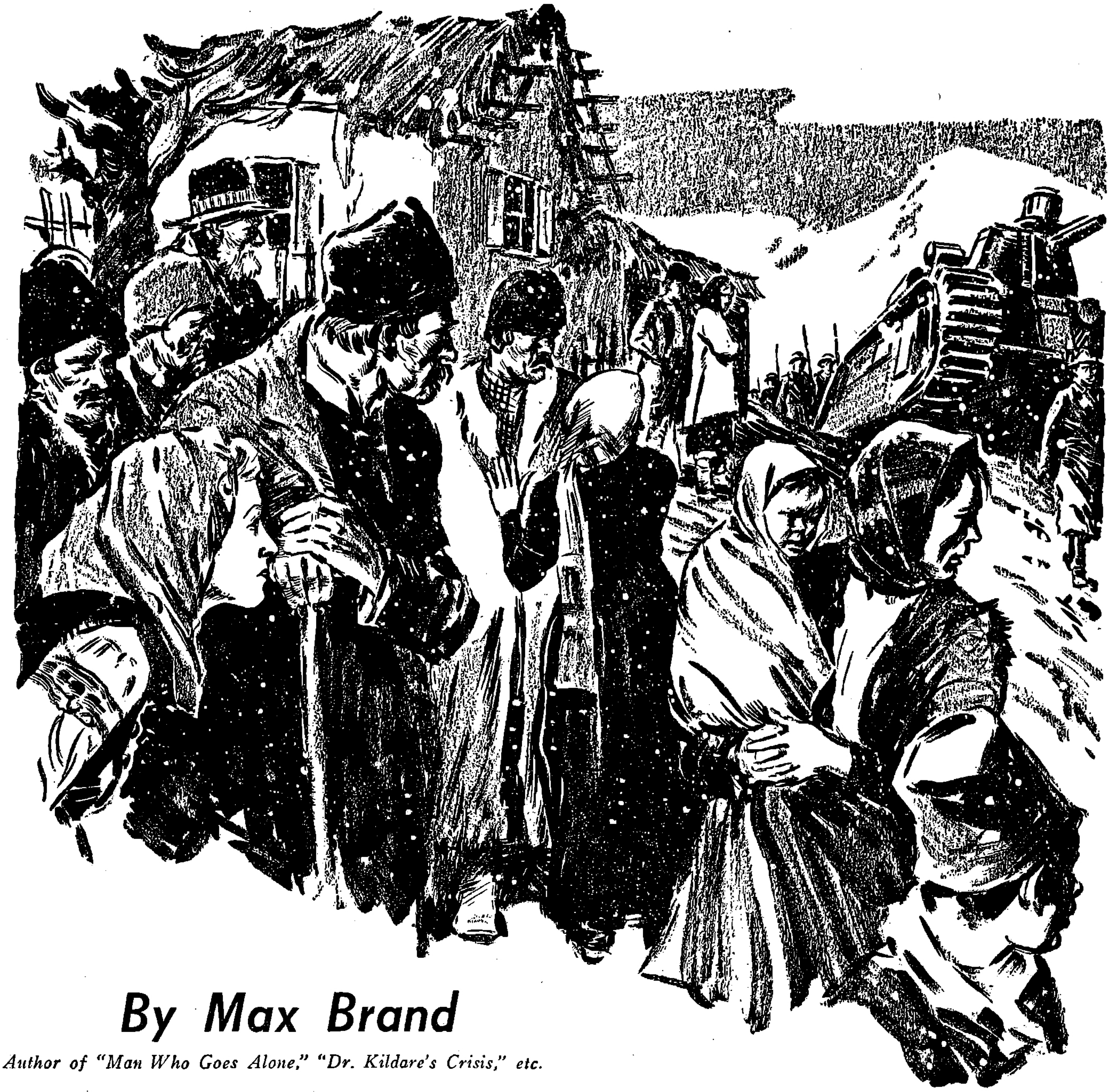
Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills.
(Adv.)


MEN OF
AIR ACES
(OLD AND NEW)
"Billy" BISHOP
NOW 46, HE IS BACK TO THE WARS AS AIR MARSHAL OF CANADA.
THE GREATEST BRITISH AIR FIGHTER OF WORLD WAR NO.1 WASN'T AN ENGLISHMAN AT ALL BUT A CANADIAN—MAJOR WILLIAM A. BISHOP.
BISHOP WENT OVERSEAS AS A CAVALRY LIEUTENANT BUT DIDN'T LIKE FIGHTING IN THE MUD AND TRANSFERRED TO THE FLYING CORPS. A SMASHED KNEE WHILE ACTING AS AN OBSERVER WAS HIS FIRST---AND ONLY---INJURY.
SCORED HIS FIRST VICTORY OVER AN ALBATROSS AND SOON HAD SO MANY PLANES TO HIS CREDIT THE GERMANS PUT A PRICE ON HIS HEAD.
OFTEN RETURNED WITH HIS PLANE RIDDLED WITH BULLETS. ONCE A TURN OF HIS HEAD SAVED HIS LIFE.
HE WON THE D.S.O. FOR ATTACKING 3 ENEMY SHIPS AND SHOOTING DOWN 2.
FAR BEHIND THE LINES, BISHOP STAGED A SOLITARY RAID ON A GERMAN AIRFIELD, DESTROYING 3 SHIPS AND WINNING THE VICTORIA CROSS.
HE BROUGHT DOWN 5 PLANES IN HIS LAST 2 HOURS OF FIGHTING. HE IS OFFICIALLY CREDITED WITH 72 VICTORIES.

A True Story in Pictures


DARING
by Stookie Allen
THE FIRST BRITISH ACE OF WORLD WAR NO. 2 WAS A 22-YEAR-OLD NEW ZEALANDER---- FLYING OFFICER EDGAR J. "COBBER" KAIN.
F7
"COBBER" KAIN
"COBBER"--ANTIPODEAN FOR "PAL"-- EARLY DISTINGUISED HIMSELF FOR SKILL AND DARING IN ATTACKING AGAINST ODDS. RENDERED UNCONSCIOUS BY THE EXPLOSION OF A SHELL FOLLOWING A COMBAT, HE CAME TO AND BAILED OUT JUST BEFORE HIS FLAMING HURRICANE FIGHTER CRASHED.
HE WON THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS WHEN, WITH A COMRADE HE ATTACKED 7 NAZI BOMBERS AND DROVE THEM BACK INTO GERMANY.
DIVING INTO A FORMATION OF MESSERSCHMITTS OVER NO MAN'S LAND, KAIN SHOT DOWN 2 BUT WAS WOUNDED AND HIS SHIP SET AFIRE. TOOK TO HIS 'CHUTE AND, AVOIDING ENEMY PATROLS, MADE HIS WAY TO THE MAGINOT LINE.
HEAD OF A ROVING COMMISSION OF PILOTS WHO HAD BAGGED 20 NAZI PLANES EACH, HE HAD SUCCEEDED IN JOCKEYING HIS BADLY CRIPPLED SHIP BACK TO THE AIRFIELD WHEN IT WENT OUT OF CONTROL AND CRASHED.
KAIN WAS CREDITED WITH MORE THAN 40 VICTORIES WHEN THE ACCIDENT PUT AN END TO HIS GALLANT CAREER.

Coming soon: Mickey Morgan—Bat Man



By Max Brand

Author of "Man Who Goes Alone," "Dr. Kildare's Crisis," etc.

East Wind

IN OCTOBER, as usual, the wind began to blow out of the east across the flats and the brown rivers of Russia, to pour all their cold upon Poland. In October, also, the Russian army of occupation reached the village of Dokociny.

The village was already starving; it had already begun to freeze; and so Dokociny remained impassive when it learned that the Russians were coming, that actually they intended to maintain a fortified encampment beside the bridgehead. It meant permanent disaster.

The men began to look sadly upon the women, the women upon the pigs in the sty and the cows in the shed and the poor, down-headed horses which had just ploughed and harrowed in the winter wheat. Even in the eyes of the children there was a look of farewell, for they understood that the Russian knows how to take all, body and soul.

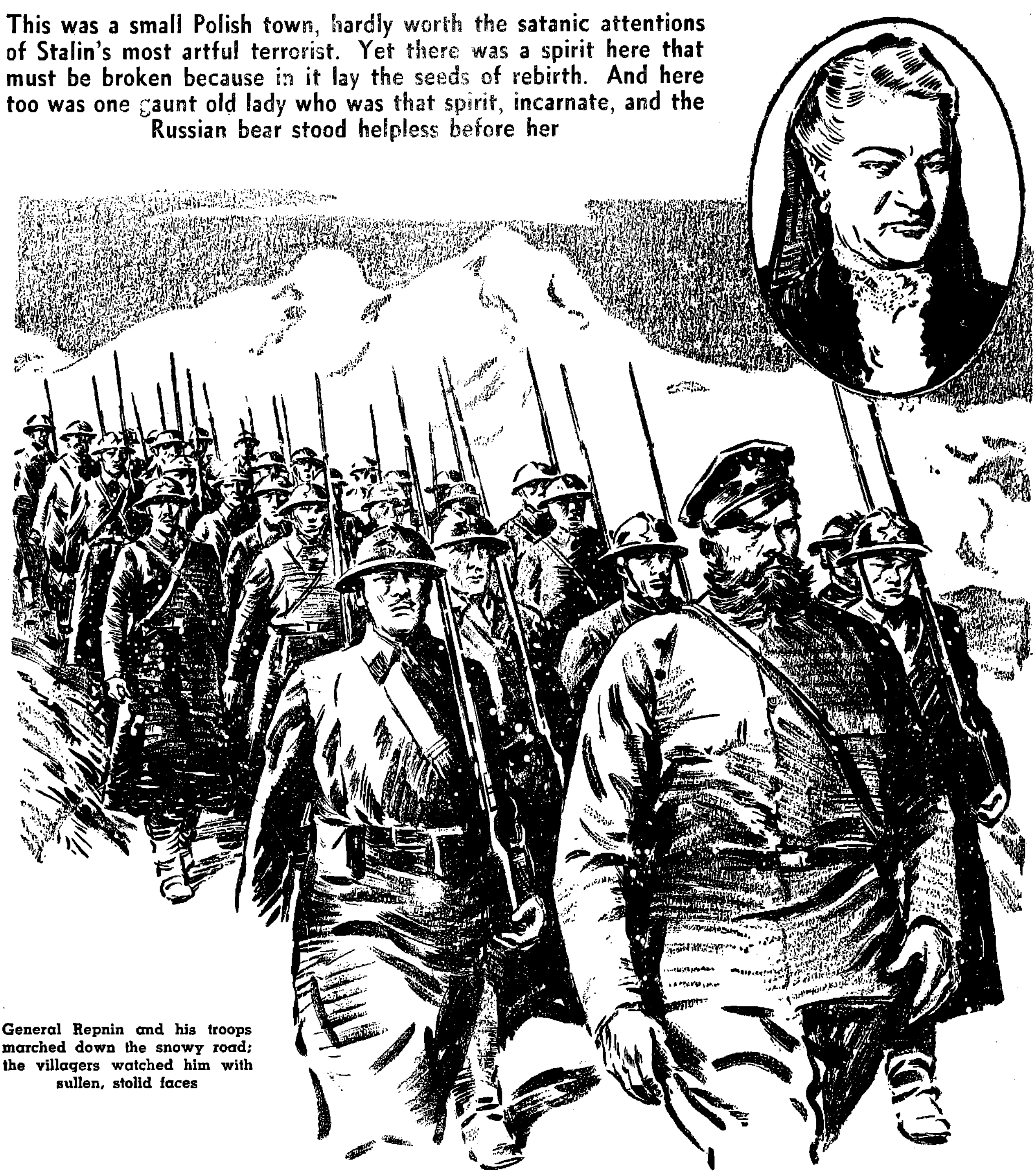
Also, the Russians had peculiar reason to hate Dokociny for in every rebellion the men of the village had died for Polish freedom. In 1920 when the Red invasion reached Dokociny Lake, the men of the village stood their ground beside the water and died to the last man, for they had been betrayed.

That is why the men of Dokociny are very old or very young. Those who would be middle-aged now had died by the lake. Clopaki was the name of the traitor. He showed the Russians the way across the marsh and let them take his people from the rear.

With such a record of stubborn patriotism, the villagers awaited the worst without much talk, for since the evil would be greater than the flesh could endure, their souls retired into deep Slavic contemplation of that peace which, in the end, all men shall inherit.

Then their priest appeared suddenly among them with

This was a small Polish town, hardly worth the satanic attentions of Stalin's most artful terrorist. Yet there was a spirit here that must be broken because in it lay the seeds of rebirth. And here too was one gaunt old lady who was that spirit, incarnate, and the Russian bear stood helpless before her



General Repnin and his troops marched down the snowy road; the villagers watched him with sullen, stolid faces

news which no philosophy, however calm and profound, could endure. The Russian commander in the district was to be none other than terrible Vladimir Repnin. He had the malice of a cripple; a knife thrust had left him almost mute. In his youth he had had the voice of a bull. Now the deep forest of his beard concealed the wound which had silenced him.

So he became an official torturer, a specialist in pain. Whether it was to put down a peasants' revolt or purge higher officialdom, there was no brutality that could not be confided to General Repnin.

When the men and women of Dokociny heard of his coming, they followed their priest to the ruins of the school, which had been destroyed during the war by some homeward-bound airman with a last bomb going to waste in his rack. The hundred families of Dokociny could not afford a church, but for generations the school had been enough for their services. Now, in the ruins of it, the priest prayed with them until the women ceased weeping aloud. But except for prayer, even the priest could offer no comfort. A storm from heaven may waver from its course but the Russian evil was like something predestined.

The shadow of Repnin now began to fall before him on the villagers, a horror sufficient to darken the eyes. He had reached Birkhov, some dozen miles to the east, which was also to be in his district. From Birkhov came tormented fugitives. They showed backs bruised and torn by the knout, and they could not take the name of Repnin in their mouths.

The people of Dokociny listened to the stories of agony, and were silent.

A little later, through the first flurry of November snow, General Repnin marched through Dokociny. It would be more accurate to say that he marched past it, for the hundred houses of the village lie all on one side of the lane, turning their backs to winter and the east and looking out across their narrow fields.

From two to five acres is a family holding, but by handworking the black soil they force a subsistence from it. Now the people stood at their doors to see the invaders go by. There was a column of rattling trucks, a stream of soldiers, but all they saw, to remember, was Vladimir Repnin.

He rode neither in an automobile, as befitted his rank, nor in one of the trucks. Instead, according to his invariable custom, he marched in the deepest mud in the middle of the road at the head of his men. Their hardships he shared with them, every one, so that although it was impossible for men to love such a monster, they were willing to follow anywhere at his heels like a pack of savage dogs acknowledging a master.

He was so huge and strong that in his uniform jacket he looked as big as a man in an overcoat. He shortened his stride to the military step, which gave him a strangely mincing air, and the wind, blowing into his face, carved his great black beard in two and showed the white skin in the parting. He looked neither to one side or the other but stared straight forward. The Russians marched through Dokociny as though it were an empty illusion.

For three days there was no sound or sight of them. They were establishing their camp near the lake and felling timber in the forest of Count Chernagov. Not evil but good news suddenly came. The three thousand acres of that estate were to be shared among the peasants of the district. Word of this was brought to Maria Clopaka. She was a tall woman with a grim face, seventy-two years old, and very gaunt, but she carried the weight of her big bones like a soldier.

At one time the family had been so honored that the village school was named *Clopaki,* but after the treason of Maria Clopaka's son, Stanislaw, at the battle of Lake Dokociny, that name had been erased. It was the Clopaka woman herself who, with a hammer and a cold chisel, cut away the word from its place of honor.

She insisted that the name of Zamoyski, who was the dead hero of the battle, should take its place. She declared that she never had had a son named Stanislaw. His picture disappeared from her house and in its place she hung a photograph of Ignacy Zamoyski. Because of these decisive actions and because she was the aristocrat of the town, she was held in great respect.

When she heard that the estate of Count Chernagov was to be partitioned she said: "Count Chernagov was our father and our friend, was he not?"

"He was a good man and a friend to us," said the school teacher, who brought the great news. "Each of our families will gain an acre or two. Think of good coming to us from the Russians!"

"I can't rob a friend," said the old woman.

"But the count is dead," said the schoolmaster.

"Shall I eat the dead?" she demanded.

The villagers were overwhelmed when they heard of this remark. But they would not flinch from this high example. Not a family in Dokociny would share in the division of the estate.

Word of this attitude, which showed in an entire village not one weak spirit, was brought to Repnin by his aide, Aksakoff, a thin man with a forward-thrusting face. He pointed out that only Polish stupidity and patriotic pride existed in Dokociny. Was it not time that the village should be taken in hand? The general showed an odd interest. He laughed. His whispering voice was ugly and sinister enough, but when he laughed it was like the hissing of a snake. He ordered that the woman Clopaka should be brought before him the next day.

A sufficient warning reached the widow. The elders advised her to flee. She refused.

"The day I leave Dokociny I am already dead," she said, and the words still are much quoted.

The priest, being sent to for his advice, made a long journey and arrived that night in time to pray for several hours with Maria Clopaka His knees and his neck both were aching, he had bowed himself so completely to the will of God and for such a long time, when he discovered that the widow, sitting upright in her straight chair, was sound asleep. He was annoyed and awakened her.

"Why should I pray when you can do it so much better than I?" she asked. "I have perfect trust in you, father."

THE next morning, without waiting to be sent for, she walked to the Russian camp. It was a whole town of square little huts and now its streets were full of *plopping* sounds as boots were pulled out of the thick mud, for the ground had not yet frozen hard and the marsh was merely soupy with the cold. A sentry took her to headquarters, where a low hut of logs already had been thrown up.

Aksakoff, the aide, was standing in front of the cabin.

"This is the woman Clopaka," said the sergeant of the guard who conducted her.

Aksakoff seemed pleased. When he smiled, his eyes were slits out of which he could hardly see, and he was always smiling.

She was inspired to say: "How do you do?" which in the Polish formula is: "Blessed be Jesus Christ!"

To this, of course, no Russian can make the proper answer. The aide merely grinned at her.

"You are Clopaka, the female patriot," he said. "But Poland is dead and only a fool loves the dead."

"Only sinners forget them," she said.

Without proverbs she would have been a silent woman. Her folk-sayings troubled Aksakoff a little.

Clopacki is a bright name in your village," he said, taking a different tack.

"A name is like the clothes we wear," she answered. "It can be soiled."

"As the name of Clopacki was by your son, the traitor?" he asked.

"I have no son," she said.

"Why do you lie, little mother?" he asked.

"In Dokociny, no one dares to say that I ever had a son."

"But, traitors or not, do you not know, little mother, that Poland never could stand against great Russia?"

She closed her eyes and quoted from the poet who says, in effect:

Poland, how could you fall?
Who could put chains upon you
Except the hands of your sons
Who fear nothing except one another?

"However, we have come to stay," said Aksakoff, his smile withering swiftly.

"The bear can walk like a man, but still it is a beast," she quoted again.

Aksakoff breathed an instant through his teeth.

"Come in, then, to the general," he invited, and opened the door, walking in before her.

INSIDE, it was as simple as a peasant's hut. In one corner was a straw tick and a roll of bedding where the general slept. In another corner there was a stove with a soup-pot blackening on top of it. One window gave light to a clerk whose table was heaped high with papers. At another table sat the general. Aksakoff took the place beside him.

"I hear that I shall be wanted. So I have come," she said.

Aksakoff was still white with anger. "Who brings news from the camp to your village?" he demanded, for he always knew the mind of his general and saved that sore, weak throat by doing the talking.

"I cannot tell," she said.

"You *will* not tell, you mean?" said the aide. "Was it a man or a woman?"

"I cannot remember," she said.

"Ah?" said Aksakoff. "We know how to freshen memories!"

He was surprised to see the general shake his head.

"Clopaka," he said, "you have incited to revolt against the orders of the United Soviet Republics. Like an old sow with a great litter at your heels, you have drawn your whole village into bad ways."

"I am old, it is true, but I am not a beast," she answered.

"Have you not called Chernagov a friend?" asked the aide.

"Should I deny the dead?" she replied.

"Good!" said the aide, settling back in his chair. "She confesses. She will make an example for the whole district."

The husky voice of the general murmured: "She is an ancient creature, and she is a woman."

Aksakoff looked twice at his master. "Two excellent reasons to make a scarecrow of her," he said, "and frighten the others."

The general lifted a big hand. The fingernails were broken and the hand thickened with labor for he was an example to his men not only on the march but also in all their daily work.

He said: "What is your age, Maria Clopaka?"

He spoke in Polish and the widow was surprised by the enunciation.

"You speak like a Pole," she said, "and as though you had been born in Birkhov or in Dokociny."

Aksakoff jumped to his feet but the general hissed at him and he grudgingly sat down again. He was in a state of high expectancy, however, for whenever Repnin held his hand in the beginning it was in order to strike harder in the end.

Repnin said: "We hear that you are starving in your village."

"That is not true," said the widow.

"What have you to eat?" asked Repnin.

"We have pigs and some cows and there are always the horses."

"How many, all told?" asked Repnin.

"Enough," she answered.

"That is a lie," said the aide. "These people of Dokociny slaughtered their pigs and shipped the meat west to their army. They gave their cattle, also. There is not one cow, now, to three houses; there is not one brood sow to two families."

"Is it true?" asked Repnin.

This whispering voice of his gave, continually, an effect of confiding sympathy. When he sent people to their death, it was as though he were sharing an intimate secret with them.

"It is not true. We have what we need," said the widow.

"Your lips already are blue," said Repnin. "How long is it since you have tasted meat?"

"It troubles my stomach," she answered.

"You have been living on tea and a little bread for weeks," said the general.

"I have all that I need," said she.

"We shall see," whispered Repnin, and set off at once to visit Dokociny.

HE TOOK the widow with him as he glanced into every pigsty, every cowshed, and poked the lean ribs of the horses. He climbed ladders into the empty attics where usually there was the store of smoked meat; he examined the supplies of hay and grain. On the whole he conducted himself more like a tyrannical landlord than like a general. He reached the house of Maria Clopaka in due time, climbed into her empty attic, looked at the slab-sided sow in the sty.

An old woman sat by the stove of Maria Clopaka. She was half blind; it was a moment before she understood enough to stand up and shrink into a corner.

"Who are you?" asked the whisper of Repnin.

"I am the servant, Anna," she said.

"Ah, ha!" murmured Aksakoff. "Do you see? An aristocrat—a servant even when she starves!"

He threw back his head and took in a long breath as if he were inhaling the smoke and fragrance of his own malice.

"This woman receives pay from you?" whispered Repnin.

"I get no pay when there is no money," said Anna.

"Can she be a servant if she works without pay?" pondered Repnin.

"Once she was a servant," said Maria Clopaka. "Now she is a friend."

The general for a long moment looked at Anna with his brilliant black eyes. Then he left the village and returned to the camp.

The rumor that stole through the Polish air that night was that Repnin would confiscate the last of the livestock and leave the village to starve indeed. The elders came in a mass upon Maria Clopaka and demanded to know what had happened.

"You know what goes on in the minds of people," they said. "Now tell us about the general. Are we to be hanged, or shot, or simply starved?"

"How can I know a man who has no voice?" she answered. "I can tell what a cow wants when its lows, or what a dog wants when it barks, but who can tell the mind of a snake?"

She brewed herself some more tea and with it ate the second half of yesterday's crust. After that she lay down on the soggy mountain of the bed whose blankets and feathers and stitched comforters were her greatest wealth, but she did not sleep very well. She felt cold. The hunger pains she knew well enough but she could not understand the chill that lingered in her blood. When at last the late autumn morning came, she realized that she was vastly relieved. Only now she understood that all night long she had been afraid.

She went into the house of her old friend, ancient Roman Pozenski, and drank tea, sitting beside his tall stove. He brought a sausage, cut off a thick slice, and toasted it at the open fire. Then he offered it to her.

She tried to refuse the food, but his hand remained in front of her face, silently insisting. At last she took it. At the first taste, water ran violently into her mouth. She had to keep swallowing fast. She ate the sausage in small bites, pretending to be very absent-minded but really making it last.

Roman Pozenski puffed at his pipe. He had lost all of his front teeth and, to keep the pipe more easily in place, he wound string around the mouth-piece.

THERE was a surprise in the village that day. Two trucks came, filled with Russians and high stacks of boxes. They entered the ruins of the Tozynski house and stored the boxes. A trumpet blew and a drum beat in the street. The people were made to come out and form a line.

It was such a cold, dark morning that there was little curiosity, no weeping, not many regrets. Probably they were to be marched away and mowed down by machine-gun fire, but who could desire very passionately to remain in a world so bleak, so hungry? The smallest of the Zamoyski boys carried in his arms a little puppy and cherished it inside his coat. He was ashamed to take it away to die with him, but he could not leave it behind.

Instead of being marched away from the village to the marsh, which would bury the dead without the digging of trenches, they were herded slowly through the old Tozynski house. There they found that the boxes from the trucks had been opened.

Strange, hopeful odors filled the air. Little packages had been made up, each filled with one day's ration. The Russian soldiers passed out the parcels with foolish smiles such as men wear when they take part in the games of children. In the background stood Valdimir Repnin with his big arms folded across his breast. He moved forward when Maria Clopaka's turn came.

"She is very thin. Give her two rations," said the general.

She was astonished. "One ration is enough," she said. Then she made herself tall. "I beg for my Anna, not for myself," she added.

"What comes to pride?" demanded the general, and she saw the gleam of his teeth through his dark beard.

"The whip of the master comes to pride," she said, out of the book. "But *I* have no master!"

The thin face of Aksakoff, as he listened, vainly expectant, compacted with many wrinkles, his venom so hurt him. Maria Clopaka turned her back on him and walked away, slowly, in case someone wished to detain her.

"Evil shall come of this," said Aksakoff, loudly, and the villagers heard.

The elders waited upon Maria later in the day, when there had been time to recover from this miracle.

"It may be true," they said, "that the beast Repnin is fatting us like calves and that he will drink our blood in the end; but in the meantime is it wise for the lamb to nibble the lion's beard? On the other hand, praise paves the way to friendship and gratitude pays for a second meal. Why do you hold up your head so high before the general?"

"I would rather be the hungry truth than the fat lie," said Maria Clopaka.

"You are alone," said the elders, "and therefore you can only die once; but we have families and we could die many times. Let your honesty have a vacation. A short rest is always good."

Maria Clopaka found no words to answer because these were proverbs. "Think of what we have said," they told her. "We shall come again. You are a danger to the whole town."

When they had gone, she lay on her back on the great bed. When her eyes were open, they saw the pictures of Christ Bearing the Cross and of St. Stephen, oil lithographs intolerably brilliant. For years they had made her think of death, and for years they had been her friends for that reason; but now they made her think of the fate of the entire village and she closed her eyes so that she might not see them.

Anna brought her tea, the cup chattering against the saucer, for age was so tremulous in her that she seemed always dying of fear. She propped the head of Maria and held the cup at her lips. Afterward she said: "Stand up, Maria Clopaka; the old men have come again to see you."

So Maria stood up and Anna smoothed the blue-checked gingham covers of the bed and the pillows before the men came in. Maria Clopaka could not look at any face among them except that of Roman.

One of them stepped forward, the old woodcutter, Igor. He said: "They have not come down on us because they plan some terrible blow. Have you heard what General Repnin did at Omsk? He herded the mujiks into the cattle shoots at the slaughter yards, and as they went by, he swung the mallet with his own hands and killed them like steers. He remembered to be thirsty after a while, like Peter the Great, and he called for beer and drank it by the quart with the blood running down into it from his hands . . .

"There is only one thing, Maria Clopaka. Go quickly to the Russian camp. Perhaps they already will be on the march. For the man Aksakoff hates you, and he is the general's voice and also his brain. Fall on your knees before the general. Beg him to take pity on Dokociny. Tell him the bad words come from you, only, and that the whole village loves him like a father that has fed his family."

"I shall go," said Maria Clopaka.

WHEN they had left the house, she told Anna to lay out her Sunday clothes and to put water on the stove. She undressed, bathed with hot water and soap, and then clothed herself in her best.

You tell the wealth of a peasant by the thickness of the pile of his bedding, and the genteel condition of a woman is witnessed in the manifold layers of her under and outer clothing. Maria Clopaka wrapped herself up like a bundle and overlaid all with a blouse that was drawn at the throat on a ribbon. Finally she tugged on the sheepskin coat with the fur turned inside. The strong smell of it was a comfort to her like the voice of an old friend.

After that she was a little tired and sat down to rest, but the moment she was in the chair thoughts commenced to pour through her mind. Twice Anna spoke to her without receiving an answer. She went hurrying to Roman Pozenski and said to him: "Maria Clopaka does not stir. She sits in a chair like a bewildered woman. Go and rouse her. Tell her again what she must do."

Roman Pozenski came accordingly to the house, but when he saw how Maria sat with unknown thoughts in her eyes, he said nothing at all. He went out to the elders who stood anxiously in the street in spite of the wind that was screaming out of the east.

"She cannot go," said Roman. "The Clopaki family have died for Poland and they know how to stand up straight, but their legs never learned how to bend at the knees and beg."

No one argued against this. The old men went back to their houses, gathered their families about them, and waited for the blow to fall.

It was about this time that Maria Clopaka finished digesting her pride. She rose from the bed and said: "I am a sinner. God have mercy on me. How easy it would be to die! But I must go to the Russians!"

Anna was so old that she looked permanently astonished. Now she was transfixed.

"But I cannot go like a beggar. I must carry a gift in my hand. What shall it be, Anna?"

"You have the cough mixture which your great grandmother invented," said Anna, "and God and St. Stephen know that the general has a sore, sore throat."

Maria stared at her. "Anna," she said, "what could I do without your brains and your quick way of using them?"

The jar of cough mixture was almost empty. She made a fresh supply out of the herb box, measuring the quantities with infinite care, and blending the simmered juices with honey and strong tea. When she had finished, she offered the blend to Anna.

"It is like walking through a pine forest in spring," said Anna. "It's like meadows in the pinewoods—and that's exactly the way it *should* smell!"

"Good!" said Maria. "I love to have you find me right, Anna."

She went out again to the Russian and was led without question to headquarters.

Aksakoff, about to enter the hut, turned and stared at her for a moment. He grinned himself blind as he held up his hands to help her from her horse.

"I want no help, friend," said Maria. "I might slip through your hands to a great fall."

"If not today, tomorrow," said the aide, hating her with his eyes brightly and patiently.

"So every cat says to every dog," said Maria, "but in Poland we ask for no reasons when we see a spider on the wall, a snake on the floor, or a Russian by the stove."

Aksakoff, drawing in his breath, made a drinking sound.

MARIA went past him and opened the door of the hut. There was a stove inside but it was not nearly warm enough; and she vowed that she saw in the lower levels of the air, where the heat had not mingled with the curdling chill of the winter, a vague little shimmer of hoar frost. Yet the general sat at ease in shirt sleeves. She half suspected that his body was covered with fur.

"It is Maria Clopaka," said the husky voice of the general. "Panovich, here she is again—the only creature in the world that has no fear. Give her a chair by the stove!"

The orderly, looking sourly at Maria as though he had heard about other attributes than courage, silently placed a chair beside the stove, but Maria was unwrapping the small jar which she had brought.

She laid it on the table before the general. "It is something for your throat," she said.

"You have brought me a present?" asked Repnin, peering. "An ointment for my throat, little mother?"

"You should take half a teaspoonful every two hours until your throat is better," she advised.

"I saw that your face was good," said the general, "and now I know that your heart is good, also . . . Panovich, a spoon!"

"Good!" said the aide, now at the elbow of his general. "She has made the poison; and now like a spider she will see it kill."

General Repnin already had a spoonful of the mixture on the way to his lips. The words of his aide struck him so forcibly that he recoiled a little. For an instant Repnin peered into the face of old Maria. Then he whispered: "The Lord giveth; and the Lord taketh away!"

Straightway the spoon was in his mouth.

The aide said: "Well, at least we shall hold her until we know there's no harm in it."

The general made no answer for a moment. He had been so greatly moved that perspiration rolled on his cheeks and filled the deep sluices of the wrinkles on his forehead. "No," he said. "Let her go. Blessed be Jesus Christ!"

"In eternity, amen," said Maria, and went unhindered through the door, though the excited voice of Aksakoff still protested behind her.

When she got home, she told everything to Roman Pozenski.

"He was afraid," said Maria. "He sweated and he trembled. And yet he took the mixture."

"He was afraid of something more than fear," said Roman Pozenski.

"Ah, and what could that be?" asked Maria.

"I cannot tell," said Roman. "Never fear. We shall find out. There is no hurry. When the story is good, you don't want to turn to the last page at once, do you, Maria?"

IT WAS dusk of the next day when the village idiot, Michael, ran from house to house, opening doors, crying out breathlessly: "General Repnin—he has come without soldiers; he is in the house of Maria Clopaka!"

It was news so great that in every house the people sat staring at one another. When they began to smile, they hardly knew why.

In fact, Repnin was standing within the threshold of Maria's house, saying: "Is it a miracle, Maria Clopaka? I take your medicine for one day, and my voice begins to return, without pain!"

So far as she could tell, it was the same husky whisper, but she began to see, now, that this was a social visit.

"Will you drink a cup of tea with us?" asked Maria Clopaka.

"Yes; I am thirsty," said the general.

"This is the only fire that is burning well," she said. "Sit here and warm yourself. I shall come back at once. Anna, ask Roman Pozenski for some of his new tea."

"Any tea will be good enough for me," said Repnin.

She studied the man and his idea with that frankness which was peculiar to her.

"No," she decided. "You have been a father to Dokociny; and we all are your children."

The thought of stalwart old Maria as a child amused Anna and sent her laughing into the darkness. In the house of Pozenski, Anna said in great excitement: "Roman! Roman Pozenski! With her own breath out of her own mouth she has asked him into her house. She has offered him tea and sent me to borrow the best you have. And—oh, Roman Pozenski, do you believe that I have heard her say that the general is a father to the village and that we are all his children?"

Pozenski was so amazed that the pipe fell out of his toothless gums.

"If she stops hating the Russians," said Anna, "what will there be to warm her blood and feed her. Roman Pozenski, is she about to die?"

Roman Pozenski brought the tea but, for the first time in his life, he was unable to offer an answer. Anna, going back to the house of her mistress, pulled the door of the kitchen open and was astonished to hear soft sounds from the zither which stood on the small corner table. It was an old song which often is heard in Poland during the winter. The words say:

East wind, have you lost your way?
Is that why you wander so wildly?
Turn about! You are far from home!
But no one there will be glad of your coming.

It was in a pause of the wind that Anna stood at the open door, agape, watching the big hands of the general as he fingered the zither. He was half-turned from her so that she saw not the thick sweep of his beard but only the shape of his head and the sidewise cant of it. That and the old, old familiarity of the song made her cry out softly: "Stanislaw Clopaki!"

HE STARTED around at her. He was frowning at once, but she had seen a single glimpse of surprise and something that was almost fear. The kindly old diminutive came to her lips.

"Oh, Stach, Stach!" she said. "Where did I put my eyes that I didn't know you and your great shoulders before?"

He made a signal for silence. "Be still, or she'll hear you!" said he.

"Why shouldn't your own mother hear me?" she asked.

"Because I'm dead," he answered, "and in her own mind she's buried me. Hold your tongue."

"The kind God forgive us," said Anna.

Maria Clopaka came in at that moment and Anna turned in haste to prepare the tea.

The general said: "I have been looking at this picture, Maria Clopaka—and who is he, again?"

"He is my son," said she. "He died at Lake Dokociny in the fighting . . . Here is tea, ready to pour. There is brown sugar or honey and lemon to mix with it."

"Let me have the brown sugar."

The general parted his beard from his red, thick lips and drank his tea noisily.

"So you lost one and gained another son?" said the general.

"I have lost nothing," said Maria.

"But I have heard of a certain Stanislaw Clopaki," said he.

"There was nothing of me in him."

Poor Anna, standing behind her mistress, pressed her knuckles against her forehead but could not equal the pain that was already in her heart.

"I have known the man in Russia," said the general. The teacup slid from the hands of Maria Clopaka and crashed on the floor, pointing toward the general. But her smile of social courtesy remained fixed and unchanged on her face.

"He has been to me at certain times," said the general, "a friend."

Anna, in the background, began to weep.

"Anna, be hushed—be still," said Maria.

"I shall tell you about him," said the general.

"No," said Maria, "it is unlucky to speak about the dead after dark."

"He still lives," said the general, "and he repents."

It could be seen in his eyes that his voice strove to become larger, but the whisper could not alter.

"He speaks of the village and of his own people," said the general. "He is a man alone. He is very unhappy, Maria Clopaka."

"There are the living," said Maria, "and then there are the dead."

"Is there not repentance and prayers?" asked the general. "And is there not forgiveness, in the name of Jesus Christ?"

"Men forgive only because they forget," she said. "*I* have not forgotten."

The old proverb came slowly, heavily from her lips. She was always bloodless but now a still greater pallor streaked her face as though with chalk.

The general arose.

"God have mercy—God have mercy!" Anna was whimpering.

"Amen," said the general, "and farewell, Maria Clopaka." He pulled open the door of the house. Snow was falling aslant on the wind and the lamplight made a white dazzle before his face. He went out and the door closed after him, leaving in the room a long whisper like his voice.

"Maria Clopaka! Maria Clopaka!" cried Anna. "How can you let him go?"

"How could I keep General Repnin?" asked Maria, turning in her chair toward the zither and commencing to finger the strings clumsily.

"But it's Stach! It's Stach that you sent away!"

Maria Clopaka lifted her head but her eyes, instead of touching Anna, found something in the past and dwelt upon it.

"Do you think the dead rise and walk, Anna?" she asked in a trembling voice. She added, loudly: "There are no ghosts in this house!"

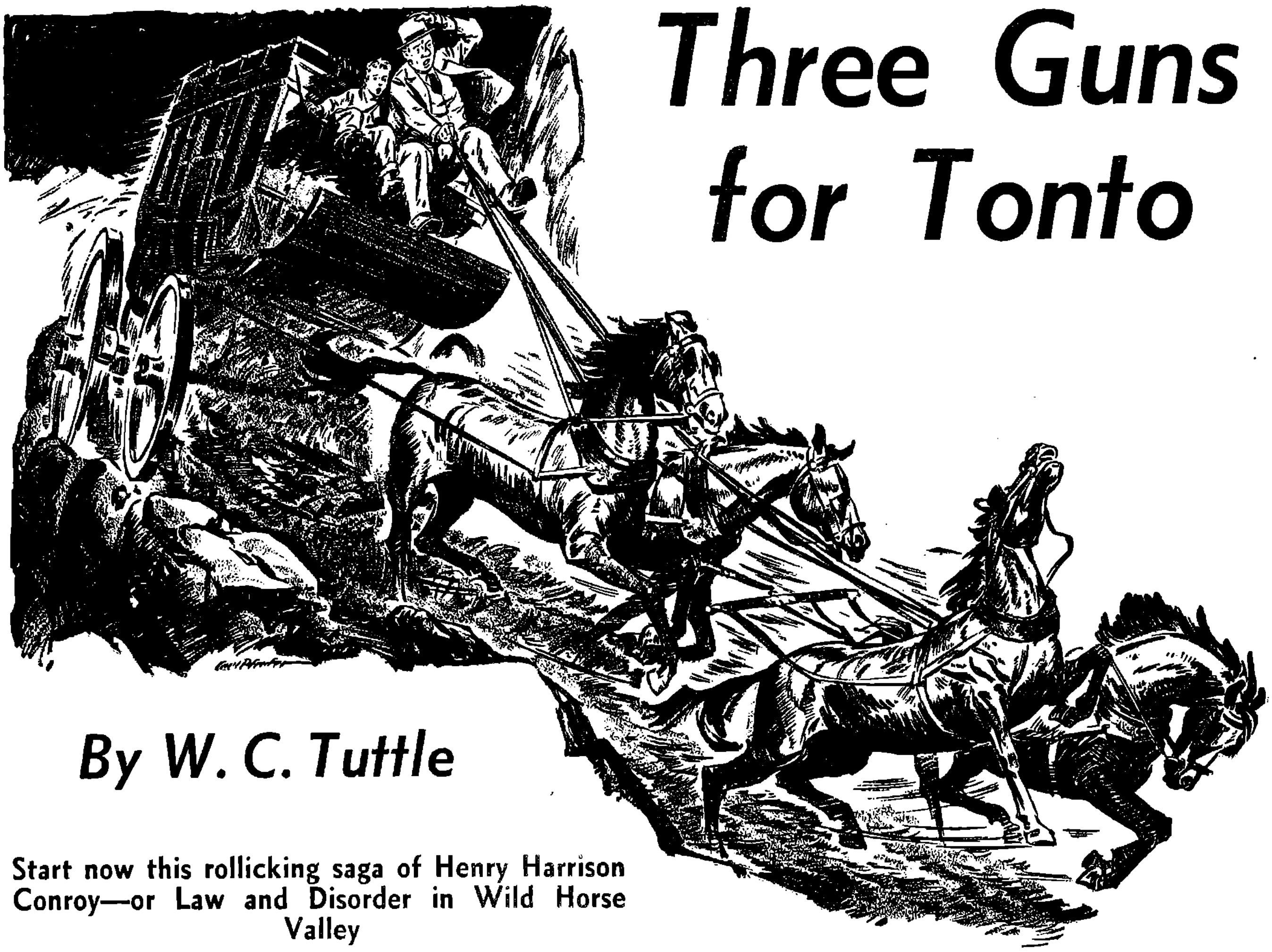
Anna shrank down into a chair. The world seemed to be stopped and embayed in a great stillness. She heard the wind beyond the house, the murmur of the fire in the stove, and the stiff fingers of Maria Clopaka picking out note by note the theme of the old song:

East wind, have you lost your way?
Is that why you wander so wildly?
Turn about. You are far from home;
But there no one will be glad of your coming.

Three Guns for Tonto

By W. C. Tuttle

Start now this rollicking saga of Henry Harrison Conroy—or Law and Disorder in Wild Horse Valley



Somehow Henry hung on, and they went madly careening around those perilous curves

ELECTION time is approaching in Tonto City, and it looks as if Henry Harrison Conroy might lose his sheriff's badge. Cash Silverton, his opponent in the campaign, has the powerful support of Big Jim Harris, the most important man in Wild Horse Valley; and of James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly, editor of the Scorpion Bend *Clarion*. So official trouble would be particularly disastrous for Sheriff Henry at this time.

And trouble promptly arrives. It is the job of Conroy and his deputy, Judge Van Treece, to transport the payroll of the Shoshone Chief mine from Scorpion Bend to Tonto. The Bank of Scorpion Bend, managed by Charles H. Baker, is the only one in the neighborhood, although Big Jim Harris plans soon to re-open the ill-fated Tonto Bank.

Henry and Judge, arriving at Banker Baker's home, are overpowered and trussed up by bandits; and Baker is compelled to accompany the men to the bank and open the vault. The robbery of the payroll will seriously cripple Nick Borden, boss of the mine, who is a friend of Henry and Judge; indeed, it will bring suffering to the whole valley.

IN THE excitement following the discovery of the bank robbery, Frijole Bill Cullison is knocked down while he is carrying a grain sack. The next morning, awaking with a malignant hangover at the JHC ranch, Frijole discovers that the sack he has brought home does not contain grain at all. It contains the stolen payroll. The explanation must be that Frijole was knocked down by one of the fleeing bandits, and the sacks were exchanged.

Frijole confides this amazing discovery to Slim Pickins, a JHC hand; and the two of them decide to bury the loot. But they do not accomplish this unnoticed; they are seen by those two maniac Mexicans, Thunder and Lightning, who promptly dig up the treasure and proceed to hide it again. When Slim and Frijole find that the money is gone, they immediately suspect the two Mexicans. But they are in no position to report what has happened to Henry Harrison Conroy.

SINCE Henry and Judge could not identify their assailants and Banker Baker can only state that one of them was a big man, the investigation of the case is not advancing. Big Jim Harris accuses Henry and Judge of lethargy and incompetency; but those two unorthodox lawmen continue to sit peacefully in their office.

They receive a number of visitors. There is a golden-haired boy of five who appears out of nowhere, says "howdy", and vanishes again. Then Editor James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly arrives, highly indignant because he has been attacked by a large masked man, who wrecked his printing shop. Pelly accuses Oscar Johnson, Henry's Scandinavian jailer, of the vandalism, for Oscar had threatened to do the editor injury. But Oscar denies it, and Henry points out that the attacker might well have been the bank robber.

Finally, a gaunt stranger steps into the office, introducing himself as Fred Langley. For years he has been seeking a man named Frank Elkins, who framed him into a prison stretch, married his sister and mistreated her so brutally that she died. Here in Tonto, Langley says, he has at last found Frank Elkins; but before he can name the man the window behind him splinters and a rifle shot crumples Langley to the floor. . . .

CHAPTER VI

BOY NAMED BUCKSHOT

OSCAR JOHNSON leaped to his feet and dived toward the doorway, only to meet two running men. One of them bounced off Oscar, collided with Pelly, and they went to the floor together.

This story began in last week's Argosy

Oscar stumbled and fell sprawling out across the sidewalk, while Judge, trying to tilt forward, skidded the rear legs of his chair and went down against the wall, both feet waving in the air. The second of the two men who met Oscar had landed in a corner, and he sat there mouth wide open, trying to pump air into his agonized lungs.

Henry said calmly, "If this is a game, gentlemen, please deal me out. It is too rough."

"Who hit me?" demanded Pelly, still dazed. "I never was so mortified in my life."

"Somebody kicked my chair loose," complained Judge. "Look at it! The back is broken and—"

"Oscar!" called Henry. "Get Doctor Knowles—quickly!"

"That man!" panted Pelly. "He's hurt?"

"That man," replied Henry, "is dead."

"Dead? My God! Right in the sheriff's office!"

"Something good to write about," Henry told him.

It seemed as though the whole town of Tonto City came to find out the reason for that one shot. Judge refused to let the crowd in until the doctor had made his examination and report. The two men who had collided with Oscar were Thunder and Lightning.

"Lightning," said Henry, "where did you come from?"

"*Mejico,*" replied Lightning meekly.

"How am I, you hope and trus'?" queried Thunder. "I damn near broke your arm pretty damn close from my elbow."

"I am not asking your nationality, Lightning," said Henry. "Where did you come from, immediately following that shot?"

"Ees that so?" queried Lightning in amazement. "I am ver' much surprise' at theenking about anytheeng—I hope."

Thunder piously crossed himself. "Dead?" he asked.

"Did you see the man with the gun?" thundered Judge.

"Sure, I don' theenk so—much," replied Thunder. "We never have one dreenk. Both of us behave yourself. *Por Dios,* we theenk those man shoot at us; so we come queek. I don't bilieve you, eh?"

The doctor shoved his way through the crowd at the doorway and began his examination.

One man volunteered the information that he had seen this man, together with a little red-headed boy, earlier in the day, and that their one-horse covered wagon was tied at the upper end of the main street.

The dead man was taken to Doctor Knowles' place, and Henry and Judge went up the street to find the little boy asleep in the old wagon. He was too frightened to answer questions, but he clung to Henry. They took him down to the office, where Henry attempted to question him.

"Where's Uncle Fred?" he asked.

"I suppose we may as well explain," said Henry. "Uncle Fred was shot a little while ago."

"Dead?" asked the little boy. Henry nodded. "But you do not need to worry, my boy. What is your name?"

"Buckshot," replied the boy.

"Buckshot? Have you no other name?"

"Nope—just Buckshot. The horse is named Pancho."

"Do you know how old you are, Buckshot?"

"Nope."

"Did you travel around the country all the time with Uncle Fred?"

"Sure."

"What a life for a baby!" exclaimed Judge.

"Who's a baby?" demanded Buckshot.

"My mistake," said Judge soberly.

"Did you have any supper?" asked Henry.

"Nope. We had some beans for breakfast—cold ones. Uncle Fred said we was broke."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "Cold beans for breakfast and nothing since. My boy, how would you like a big supper, with milk and perhaps a piece of pie?"

"Where can you get it?" asked the youngster.

Henry held out his arms, and the youngster fairly leaped.

"He certainly takes to you," remarked Judge.

"This boy shows good judgment. While I take him to the restaurant, you go to the hotel and tell them to move an extra bed into our room. For probably the first time in his life, Buckshot is not going to sleep with his clothes on, wrapped in a blanket and on the hard bottom of a wagon. No clothes, not enough food and—how long since you had a bath, Buckshot?"

"I don't remember," replied the boy. "What is your name?"

"Just call me Uncle Henry," the sheriff told him.

"Sure." Buckshot smiled. "I like you."

"Son," said Henry soberly, "I feel blessed above all men. Hang on and we'll soon have you confronting a big meal. Judge, you see about the extra bed."

HENRY carried Buckshot down to a restaurant, where he proceeded to order a meal that would have satisfied a working man. Buckshot looked at it in amazement, but he dug right in, while Henry beamed. Frijole Bill, trailed by Thunder and Lightning, came down there, and Buckshot was more than mildly interested in Frijole's mustache, which twitched nervously.

"What do you think of him?" asked Henry proudly.

"I'm tryin' to classify him," replied Frijole. "Looks fine."

"Pretty swell keed, eh?" said Lightning. "I'm look like heem, w'en I am leetle feller—I hope."

"Red hair and blue eyes, I suppose," said Henry.

"Sure. I'm change leetle beet, I'm theenk, if possible."

Oscar came in, beaming widely. "Das ha'ar is a fine looking boy," he declared. "Ay vant to bounce him on my knee. Ay look like him ven Ay vars young. By Yimminy, Ay had hair yust like mostard."

"And some big brute bounced you on his knee, I presume."

"You bat you, Ay vars bounced good."

"You show it," said Henry. "How are you coming, Buckshot?"

"Pretty full, Uncle Henry. Awful good food."

"That is fine. Tomorrow we will see about new clothes. No doubt you would like some new clothes."

"Boots, too?"

"Possibly."

"And a gun, too?"

"My goodness! At your age?"

"Ay have old von he can have," offered Oscar.

"Indeed! A baby with a gun!"

"Who's a baby?" asked Buckshot.

"Stout fellow!" applauded Henry, as he picked up the little fellow. "Go home and let me put this newest buckaroo to bed."

As they started for the door, Big Jim Harris and Charles

Baker, the banker from Scorpion Bend, came in. Henry stopped and looked them over.

"Of all the damned actions I ever heard of, this beats 'em all!" exploded Big Jim. "A man is murdered in your office, and all you do is act nursemaid to a kid. Conroy, it is time that the county threw you out of office. This town could be full of thieves and murderers, and you would not even be interested. Why, damn it, man, you haven't even tried to find out who fired that shot."

Oscar Johnson shoved his way between Henry and Big Jim. "Ay don't like the way you talk, Big Jim," he said coldly.

"Why, you big squarehead!" snapped Big Jim. "I'll knock your head off!"

Big Jim Harris was a powerful man, nearly as big as Oscar, but his right-hand punch to the side of Oscar's jaw failed even to knock the big Swede off balance.

The next moment Oscar's looping right crashed square on Big Jim's nose, and Big Jim went backward against the little cashier's counter, tearing it loose from the floor, and Big Jim sprawled flat on his back, knocked cold. Oscar whirled on the amazed Mr. Baker.

"You vant some of dis?" he asked quickly.

"My God—no!" gasped the banker.

The two frightened Chinese babbled Cantonese at the top of their voices, as they peered out from the kitchen. Henry said:

"Good evening to you, Mr. Baker. Nice to have met you again."

Then he walked out, carrying Buckshot, who did not seem greatly perturbed over the fight.

Charles Baker managed to get Big Jim back on his feet, and took him down to Doctor Knowles. Big Jim was choking with wrath, and he had a badly broken nose. Doctor Knowles stopped the bleeding, but he was dubious about that nose ever being very good-looking again.

"Every bit of bone is smashed," he told Big Jim. "I will do my best, but I am afraid it will always look rather flat."

"Figs id ub the best you cad, doc," pleaded Big Jim. "I'll ged thad dabed Swede if id's the last thig I ever do."

THUNDER and Lightning went back to the ranch without Oscar, who stayed at the office. They took a quart of tequila along to help them recover from a strenuous evening.

"W'en we deeg up those *dinero?*" queried Thunder. "I wan' go back to *Mejico* and be reech man. These damn Wil' Horse Valley get too toff for me, I theenk, eef notheeng happens."

"Mucho tiempo," said Lightning. "Eef you queet now, I weel suspec' you. Take plenty time. Some day we weel queet and go to *Mejico* and leeve reech from our old ages. You onnerstand, I hope."

They stabled the buckboard team and went into the house, where they found a hunk of cold roast beef. Pouring the tequila in two large glasses, they sat down to enjoy life.

Tequila is very potent. Distilled from a mash made of maguey, it has all the stealth of a marauding Apache, and the power of the Supreme Court. Long before the quart was finished Thunder and Lightning had mellowed to the point where they were already sharing their wealth with the peon classes.

Suddenly the front door opened and in came two masked men, guns in hand. Thunder and Lightning sat up.

"Don't move," growled one of the men.

"No move—I hope," agreed Lightning owlishly.

"All right. If yuh lie to us, I'll shave yore ears off. Where'd yuh hide the money yuh stole from that bank?"

"Madre de Dios!" gasped Lightning. "We never still money from banks."

"You stole the money and hid it," declared the masked man. "You show us where yuh hid that money, or you'll die right here. Or do yuh want a bullet in yore darned gizzard?"

"No bullet een the geezard," declined Lightning. "How you know we hide those money? How you prove those theengs, *amigo?*"

"We seen yuh!" snapped the other masked man.

"Por Dios!" gasped Thunder. "They seen you hide heem."

"Now," growled one of the men, "we're gettin' to it. You hid it."

"Ees that so?" queried Lightning. "You know w'ere we hide heem?"

"Yo're damn right we do."

"Eef you know the place, w'y don' you go get heem?"

That was unanswerable. The two masked men debated silently. Lightning blinked thoughtfully. Finally he said to one of them:

"W'ere you get Frijole's shirt? You keel heem maybe—I hope not."

"Keel two," declared Thunder. "Those man got Sleem's belt!"

"Shut up!" snapped one of the men. "You've talked too much. Tell us where yuh hid that money, or we'll—"

"Madre de Dios!" gasped Lightning. "More!"

The front door opened silently and three more masked men stepped into the room, covering the four men.

"Drop them guns!" snapped a voice, and two guns thudded to the floor.

"What the hell!" snorted one of the newcomers. Another said:

"What's the idea of the masks? Step back and let us get those guns."

One of the men secured the guns. Lightning said:

"W'at ees the masquerade for, I hope?"

"All right, you two," growled one of them. "Take off the masks."

Very sheepishly Frijole and Slim Pickins removed their masks.

"Looks like joke, eh?" remarked Thunder.

"Keep thinkin' that, and you'll git yourself a tombstone," growled one of the men. "What did these two masked jaspers want?"

"Money," replied Lightning. "They theek we rob banks —but I hope not."

"Oh, so they think you robbed the bank, eh? Well, didja?"

"I cross hees heart, I hope you die," swore Lightning.

"I'll be damned! If you didn't, who did? Who got that money? Don't lie about it. We came to get that money, and we're goin' to git it, if we have to kill all four of you and turn this ranch upside down. All right—start talkin'."

"You fellers have got the wrong idea," said Slim. "Me and Frijole was havin' some fun with these two Mexicans. We ain't got no money. We didn't rob no bank, and you know it."

"We ort to," chuckled one of the men. "We robbed it ourselves."

"There yuh are," sighed Frijole. "They got it. We can't stop yuh from robbin' us, but yuh won't git over six-bits."

"Listen, feller. One of yuh swapped sacks with us, and we want the right sack. If you think we're goin' to let such fellers as you beat us out of a fortune, yo're all wrong. Yo're layin' yourselves open to a good pistol whippin', so start talkin'. We ain't got all the time there is—and we want that money."

"Swapped sacks?" queried Frijole innocently. "H-m-m-m. Did any of you fellers swap sacks with anybody?"

"Sounds loco to me," declared Slim. "Who'd swap sacks?"

"Enough of this talkin'!" snapped one of the men. "We came here to get that money. If you don't—"

At that moment one of the horses at the porch evidently decided to shake itself violently, and the heavy romal on the end of the reins slapped against the porch. Frijole, facing the doorway, yelled:

"Look out, Oscar! Git back!"

The three masked men sprang aside, out of line with the doorway, trying to look outside and also keep their eyes on the other four men.

"That damn Swede!" exclaimed one of them. "He *would* come!"

"Uh-huh." Frijole nodded calmly. "And as soon as he gits that sawed-off shotgun from the bunkhouse, you'll wish for better weather. That Swede's bad medicine, if yuh ask me."

The three masked men took him at his word. Swiftly they backed to the doorway, slammed the door behind them and dived for their horses. A moment later and three sets of hoofs thundered back down the road toward the front gate. Frijole barred the door, his mustache twitching with mirth.

"Where-at is Oscar?" queried Slim.

"Prob'ly sleepin' in the office," replied Frijole. "Man, we shore scared them masqueraders. Wait a minute and I'll fetch out a fresh jug of prune juice."

CHAPTER VII

TAKE AIM AT THE MOON

DOCTOR KNOWLES, in searching the clothing of Fred Langley, found a remnant of a letter to Langley from an inmate of the prison from which Langley had been released. It bore the prison stamp.

Henry sent the following telegrams to that prison:

> FRED LANGLEY EX-INMATE YOUR INSTITUTION KILLED HERE PRESUMABLY BY BROTHER-IN-LAW NAMED ELKINS BUT UNDER ASSUMED NAME. HAVE YOU ANY INFORMATION REGARDING ELKINS OR ANY DESCRIPTION BY WHICH HE MIGHT BE IDENTIFIED? ANY INFORMATION WOULD BE APPRECIATED.

"Shooting at the moon," remarked Judge.

Buckshot, clad in new clothes, bathed and well fed, sat on the edge of Henry's desk. "Gotta have a dog," he stated.

"I suppose that is true," agreed Henry.

"Named Epidermis," said Buckshot happily.

"Epidermis?" queried Judge. "What a name for a dog!"

"We had one," Buckshot informed him. "Uncle Fred said he ran away with a lady coyote." He looked solemn.

"Was he a good dog?" chuckled Henry.

"Sure. Uncle Fred said you couldn't blame him for pullin' out. Uncle Fred said he was just like a man—always lookin' for love and food."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. Judge shook his head.

"Imagine that from the mouth of a babe!" he said.

Doctor Knowles came down to the office. Arrangements had been made for the inquest. The doctor had just come from the King's Castle Saloon, where he had made an adjustment on Big Jim's nose.

"I imagine his olifactory nerves are rather muddled," said Henry.

"Muddled! I don't believe any are left, Henry. I am afraid that Mr. Harris, depending on his sense of smell, will never know an onion from a rose. A kicking horse couldn't have done a better job."

Nearly every one in Tonto City was interested in the inquest and in the little red-headed boy; so the courtroom was crowded. No one knew the deceased, and only Thunder and Lightning had had any chance to see the killer. Henry warned the doctor that Thunder and Lightning would be of no use as witnesses, but the doctor, acting as the county coroner, insisted. Lightning was solemnly sworn and faced the six-man jury.

"Lightning," said Doctor Knowles, "it seems that you and your brother were outside the sheriff's office when the fatal shot was fired. I want you to tell the jury your story."

"My story?" queried Lightning.

"That's right—tell them your story."

"Sure," smiled Lightning. "Frijole tell me one good story. You like from hearing those story of the drommer and the former's daughter—I hope not?"

"Hold it!" snorted Judge. "Not that one. It is no use, doc. You may as well forget their testimony."

"But these two men saw the shot fired, Judge. Perhaps Thunder can tell it better than Lightning. Swear Thunder. Yes, you are excused, Lightning." Thunder was duly sworn.

"My leetle brodder," explained Thunder expansively, "ees no good for the telling. Always he ees getting the cart behin' the horses, I'm theenk, probably. W'at you want for hearing, doctor?"

"Did you see the shot fired?"

"Sure. My brodder yalls, *'Cuidado!'* jus' like those."

"We don't care what he yelled. Did you see the man who fired the shot?"

"Sure, I see heem."

"You did? Thunder, who—"

"Just a moment!" interrupted Henry. He placed Buckshot on the chair and came over to the coroner. "If Thunder saw this man, doctor, this is no place to disclose his identity or description. That is something for my office alone."

"Yes, you are right," agreed the coroner. "Gentlemen," he turned to the jury, "there is no further evidence; so you need not leave your seats to bring in the usual verdict."

"You word it for us, doc," said the tall lanky foreman.

"What is to be done with the child?" asked one of the men.

"I will take care of the boy," said Henry firmly.

"But he needs a woman's care."

"Who does?" asked Buckshot, and the crowd roared.

"You'll have plenty time to nurse him after election," called a voice from the back of the room, which brought another laugh.

"I believe," stated Judge ponderously, "that the intelligent voters of Wild Horse Valley will speak with ballots and not through the vapid vocal cords of an ignorant heckler, who is ashamed to show his face."

"Yeah, and you'll go back to brushin' flies off a bar," said the voice again.

THE coroner read the verdict and people began filing out toward the stairway. Suddenly there was a commotion, a few strangled bursts of profanity, followed by a dull crash. Oscar Johnson shoved his way through the crowd and came back to Henry.

"What happened out there?" asked Henry.

"Oh, Ay yust t'rowed some wapid vocal cords downstairs," said Oscar, grinning.

"My goodness! Who was it, Oscar?"

"It vars Cash Silverton."

"Was he the one who made those remarks?" asked Judge.

"Yah, su-ure. Ay vars right behind him, Yudge."

"Was he hurt?" asked Henry anxiously.

"Ay don't t'ink so, Henry; he bounced vonce before he hit bottom."

"For once," said Judge soberly, "I have no fault to find with the Vikings."

They took Buckshot back to the office, and on the way they saw Doctor Knowles hurrying over to the King's Castle.

"It appears," remarked Henry, "that Oscar may have been a trifle rough with Mr. Silverton."

"Big brute," said Buckshot casually.

"Exactly!" snorted Judge. "An amazing observation for his years."

Charles Baker, the Scorpion Bend banker without a bank, came down to the office. He was greatly depressed over the situation, and anxious for something to be done about recovering the lost money.

"We are doing everything possible," assured Henry. "It has been a severe blow to everyone, Mr. Baker. I am afraid it will make it doubly difficult for Mr. Harris to launch his new bank here. People will be afraid of banks."

"I realize that," agreed the banker. "In fact, Mr. Harris has offered me the position of executive in this new bank. Of course, you must realize that the Scorpion Bank is ruined. There is no chance to reopen the institution—and I feel that this is my opportunity."

"By all means," said Henry. "Mr. Harris is a very fine man."

Baker looked curiously at Henry. "It is rather queer to hear *you* say that, Mr. Conroy."

"My dear Mr. Baker, I bear no malice. While Mr. Harris and I may not agree on certain policies, I appreciate his right to differ with me. I may be entirely wrong. Every man has a right to his own opinions."

"Was Cash Silverton badly hurt?" asked Judge.

"Painfully, I believe," replied Baker. "His remarks were ill-advised."

"Perhaps," said Henry, "Mr. Silverton has never studied diplomacy."

"He is merely a hard-jawed, ignorant puncher," declared Judge.

"Mr. Harris' choice," added Henry quietly, as he adjusted Buckshot's neckerchief. "What do you think of our little buckaroo, Mr. Baker?"

"I know little about children," said Baker stiffly.

"I'm a rootin', tootin' puncher," said Buckshot. "Frijole said I was. He's goin' to make me some cookies and learn me to shoot a gun. Then I can have one of my own, Uncle Henry."

"What is to be done about the boy?" asked Baker.

"That is something to be decided in the future," said Henry. "Just at present, Buckshot and I are getting along fine."

"Quite a responsibility. Well, I must go back to Scorpion Bend. We shall all be greatly interested in your investigation, I'm sure."

After Baker had left the office, Judge said:

"Henry, just why in the devil did he come down here?"

Henry smiled slowly. "I suppose he is anxious for the bank robbery to be solved. Judge, how long did Baker run the Scorpion Bend Bank?"

"About two years, I believe. Why do you ask, sir?"

"Just to make conversation, I suppose, Judge. How about some food, Buckshot? Are you hungry?"

"Sure." Buckshot grinned. "I could eat a raw dog. That's what Uncle Fred used to say."

"Maybe that is what became of Epidermis," Judge laughed.

THUNDER and Lightning got together at the JHC bunkhouse and discussed current issues. They realized that Slim and Frijole suspected them of digging up their treasure cache, and that Slim and Frijole were watching their every move. It was also very evident that the real bank robbers realized that someone at the JHC had accidentally taken possession of that money.

"I theenk they come back," said Lightning. "Pretty queek they cut your ears off right close to my damn head."

"Damn bad," agreed Thunder. "Maybe we better hide heem in place we can' remember."

"Money ees no good w'en you are dead," said Lightning sagely.

They wandered out by the corral where they stood around. Finally, feeling that they were not being watched, they slipped through the fence and made their way to the spot where they had hidden the loot from the Scorpion Bend Bank.

"I'm got queek idea," declared Lightning. "We deeg heem up, hide heem close to the corral. Tonight we tak' horse and go to *Mejico*. We hide those meelion dollar een *Mejico*. Pretty queek, maybe t'ree, four month, we queet those job and go back to *Mejico* to die from old ages, I hope not, weeth all those money. How you like from those?"

"Buena!" applauded Thunder. "I'm pretty smart, eh? Come on."

They had marked the spot, and while Thunder kept guard, Lightning proceeded to dig. He dug and dug until Thunder got nervous and came to him, wide-eyed, as Thunder stood staring at the hole in the sand.

"I be a damn liar, and that ees all I hope!" snorted Lightning.

"Vamoso?" asked Thunder huskily.

"Not here," whispered Lightning. "This ees the place."

Lightning got to his feet and looked with an evil expression upon his brother. Thunder said:

"My leetle brodder, you maybe walk in my sleep?"

"You theenk I—*Madre de Dios,* you come here and deeg—alone?"

They glared at each other like two strange bulldogs, and began circling in the sand, but not getting close enough to grapple. In fact, they kept up that continuous circling, grimacing at each other, until Lightning accidently fell into the hole he had dug in the sand.

"Keeng's Hex!" he shouted, pawing sand out of his ears.

"Thunder leaned against a mesquite, observing the scene solemnly. Slowly his brother got to his feet, and they looked each other over thoughtfully.

"W'at you theenk?" asked Thunder.

"I'm theenk we been robbed," declared Lightning. "Every time I get reech, somebody takes heem away from you. I fill for crying."

"You theenk Sleem and Frijole tak' heem?"

Lightning shrugged his shoulders. *"Quien sabe?"*

SOMEONE down at the ranch was calling Lightning's name; so they went sadly down through the brush and came out near the stable. Henry and Judge were at the ranch-house, with Buckshot, who was trying to make a close acquaintance with Bill Shakespeare, the rooster. He stopped to consider Frijole.

"Hyah, cowboy," said the cook, grinning.

"Hyah, pardner," said the little boy soberly. "How's yore folks?"

"Well, I'd tell a man!" gasped Frijole. "I jist would!"

"Tell him what?" asked Buckshot.

"You'd be surprised," Frijole said.

Thunder and Lightning arrived and Buckshot looked them over with considerable interest.

"How am I, you hope?" queried Lightning.

"Beats me," declared Buckshot.

"Por Dios!" exclaimed Thunder. "Look at those boots!"

"W'at you theenk from those?" gasped Lightning. *"Chico vaquero."*

"What are yuh goin' to do with the kid?" asked Frijole.

"Keep him," replied Henry.

"Yuh can't keep somebody else's kid, can yuh?"

"Don't you like him, Frijole?" asked Henry quietly.

"Well, yeah, I—sure, I like him. Buckshot, yuh can call me Uncle Bill."

"Too many uncles," said Buckshot. "I'll call yuh Frijole."

"That shore suits me. Do yuh like cookies?"

"Uh-huh—and mulligan."

"You'll do to take to the wagon," declared Frijole.

Henry and Judge took Thunder and Lightning down by the corral, where Henry said:

"Thunder, at the inquest you said you saw the man who fired the shot that killed the man in my office doorway. Are you able to tell me who that man is?"

"I never seen heem good," replied Thunder. "Pretty dark."

"That is what I suspected," sighed Judge. "Did you see him at all?"

"I don't theenk ver' much."

"Did . . you . . see . . him . . at . . all?"

"Not all," said Thunder peacefully.

"What did he look like?" asked Henry.

"I theenk he was a man eef you are not meestaken, I hope."

"That should readily identify anyone," remarked Henry. "I felt that your identification would be about that complete, because if there had been any chance of your identification, that man would have killed you long before this."

"Good theeng he don't know heem, eh?" queried Lightning.

"I'm not too sure," said Judge dryly. "Personally, I hoped that the killer might have not been so sure you could not identify him."

CHAPTER VIII

PASS THE PRUNE JUICE

THE following morning Henry received a telegram, not from the warden of the penitentiary, but from the sheriff of an adjoining county. It read:

> STEVE ELKINS STILL WANTED HERE ON CHARGE OF ROBBERY AND SUSPICION OF MURDER. AGE ABOUT FORTY-FIVE HEIGHT ABOUT FIVE FEET ELEVEN INCHES WEIGHT ABOUT ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY HAIR DARK MIGHT BE GRAY NOW EYES BROWN. THIS MAN IS WELL EDUCATED AND HAS BEEN AN ACCOUNTANT. DRESSES WELL AND HAS PLEASING PERSONALITY. NO CRIMINAL RECORD BUT HAS USED SEVERAL ALIASES AND IS SAID TO BE DANGEROUS. ONLY IDENTIFYING MARK KNOWN IS A TRIANGLE SCAR ON BACK OF NECK BELOW COLLAR LINE. IF DISCOVERED ARREST AND NOTIFY US AT ONCE.
>
> AL RYAN SHERIFF

"That message simplifies everything," remarked Judge. "All you have to do is go around the country, looking down the back of each man's collar, Henry. The description possibly fitted this man five years ago, and is so meager that it could fit nearly any man, if he had brown eyes. At least, we know he is reputed to be dangerous."

"True," agreed Henry. "But that is superfluous. Any man who shoots his fellow man in the sheriff's office must be rated as dangerous—and nervy."

"You might put an ad in the Scorpion Bend *Clarion,* Henry."

"The *Clarion,* sir," replied Henry dryly, "is giving us plenty of free advertizing. I shudder to think what will be in that next issue, if Mr. Pelly secured another supply of ink. If not, he may open one of his arteries and print it in blood."

"There isn't enough red blood in his body to sign his name, if he only used initials," declared Judge. But seriously, Henry, have you any inkling as to who might be Elkins?"

"You embarrass me, sir," replied Henry. "Were I to say I do, I would be lying. I am very much like that painting of a dejected-looking lady, trying to coax music from a broken-string harp."

"I believe," said Judge, "the title was 'Hope'."

"Exactly."

"Then you admit that your harp is broken?"

"She evidently did not—why should I? Judge, I feel that Buckshot needs the broadening influence of travel; so, unless something unforeseen happens, I shall take him for a stage ride to Scorpion Bend tomorrow."

"Just for what reason, if I may ask, sir?" demanded Judge.

"Oh just to indulge in my new hobby."

"And that is?"

"Trying to pick up some loose ends, Judge. And while I am gone, you might devote a little time to looking down the collars of a few of our best citizens. At your height, you should find this easily accomplished. Do not make it obvious, of course."

"I, sir," declared Judge, "have never been a collar-peeker."

"No, I suppose not, I presume you know the shape of a triangle, Judge?"

"Why, certainly."

"At least," said Henry dryly, "you could coöperate that much."

"Just what do you mean, sir?" queried Judge quickly.

"Oh, merely that in case I should discover a man with such a mark on the back of his neck, you could agree that it was a triangle mark."

Judge looked thoughtfully at Henry and drew a deep breath. "Did you ever, in your whole life, have a serious moment, Henry?"

"Perhaps—just for a moment, Judge. Just now, for instance, since you ask. You are a serious man. In fact, you have been serious all your life. Has it been a benefit to you? Have you made the people any happier, or made the world any brighter, because you were a serious-minded person?"

"Life itself is serious, Henry."

"Life is what we make it."

"I suppose you are right, Henry. God made you a clown."

"He did not! Don't blame the deity for our faults. He did not make you a lawyer. Take some of the discredit to yourself."

"The law is a dignified profession, sir."

"I believe," said Henry quietly, "we need a drink."

FRIJOLE and Slim Pickins mourned the loss of that money over a jug of prune juice. There was little doubt that it had been unearthed by Thunder and Lightning, but just how to force them to confess and give up the plunder was a problem. But the prune juice solved it. Together they walked into the bunkhouse and pounced upon the siesta-taking Mexicans, who howled loudly.

"All right, you coffee-colored thieves," said Slim, "go ahead and tell us where yuh cached that money, or we'll saw off yore ears."

Frijole already had a long-bladed pocket knife in his hand and was making sawing motions with it. Lightning capitulated.

"*Madre de Dios,* we tell!" he yelped.

"Good!" grunted Slim. "Show us where you hid it."

Frijole took the shovel, and they followed the two Mexicans up through the brush to the spot where they had burrowed into the sand, trying to find it.

"We hide heem there," stated Lightning, pointing at the hole.

"Danged ignorants didn't have sense enough to fill up the hole," declared Frijole. "Lemme at it with the shovel."

Frijole dug and dug, while Slim and the two Mexicans squatted on their heels and watched him sweat. When the hole was about four feet square and four feet deep, Frijole flung his shovel aside and glared at Lightning.

"There ain't nothin' here!" he snorted. "You know dang well there ain't."

"Sure," agreed Lightning blandly. "We try to find heem biffore, but he ees gone."

"Gone?" queried Frijole. "Yuh mean—gone?"

"Went," said Thunder. "Somebody take heem."

"Yuh mean," said Slim, "yuh hid it here and somebody took it?"

"You cross his heart, I hope you die," swore Lightning. "We theenk maybe you get heem, Sleem."

"Listen!" snorted Frijole, thoroughly angered. "You knowed it was gone and yet you let me dig my heart out! I've got a notion—"

"You ask where we hide heem," remarked Lightning.

"Yeah, that's right, Frijole," said Slim. "But who got it? Who saw you hide it, Lightning?"

"*Dios,*" suggested Thunder piously.

"Mebbe the Lord saw yuh hide it, but He never dug it up."

Thunder shrugged his shoulders. He had given his idea on the subject. Frijole sat on the edge of the hole and clawed at his mustache, trying to puzzle out the mystery. Finally he got to his feet and flung the shovel far into the brush.

"Just like a damn dream!" he snorted. "Git rich all to once—and then wake up. Shucks, I'll have to work all my life for a livin'!"

"W'at you theenk," asked Lightning, "Henry will theenk, w'en he know you two rob those bank?"

"We never robbed no bank, you ignorant wrangler!" yelped Frijole.

"I can' help w'at I am theenking," said Lightning.

"Well," said Frijole wearily, "there ain't no use standin' here, cryin' over spilled milk."

"Meelk?" queried Thunder. "Those was money."

"Aw, you danged—"

At that moment a rifle shot blasted along the rocky hills, quickly followed by another. Then came a splattering of revolver shots.

"What the hell!" snorted Slim. "C'mon!"

SLIM'S order was entirely wasted because he was bringing up the rear, as all four of them headed for the ranch-house, with Frijole in the lead, and gaining more lead at every jump. Several more revolver shots were fired, which only served to spur the runners on. They fairly skidded around a corner of the ranch-house and dived through a doorway.

"Close!" panted Slim. "Mighty close."

"Close to what?" asked Frijole, panting for breath.

"My Gawd!" snorted Slim. "There wasn't one of them bullets that missed me more'n an inch. Frijole, I'm scared I'm a marked man."

"Well, you ain't been marked yet, coyboy. Lemme git at that rifle in the corner and I'll shore make 'em hard to find."

"The firin'-pin's busted," panted Slim.

"All right, by doggies, I'll git me an ax. I'm a hard man to attack thataway"

"You theenk somebody ees died?" asked Lightning.

"If they ain't—they will," declared Frijole. "You and Thunder keep back and lemme have m' will with them dry-gulchers."

"What'r yuh waitin' for—the cavalry?" asked Slim.

Thunder had his nose glued against a rear window, and now he yelled: "Here comes Danny, running on hees feet weethout a horse."

"Danny?" queried Frijole. "Must be back from Silver City."

Danny Regan, foreman of the JHC, hurried in through the kitchen and stopped in the entrance to the main room. Danny was limping a little, and one of his hands had been cut.

"Didn't yuh hear the shootin'?" he asked breathlessly.

"Thought I did, but wasn't sure," replied Slim. "What happened?"

"That's what I want to know! I was ridin' down almost to the clearin', when all to once I busted into two masked men on horseback. They both took a shot at me and one of 'em got my horse. It was all done mighty quick and without any conversation. Me and the horse went down together, but I fell free and started workin' on 'em with a six-gun. And more than that, I"—Danny hesitated—"I got one of 'em."

"You killed one?" gasped Frijole. Danny nodded.

"What—what became of the other, Danny?"

"Got away through the brush. I—I took a look at this feller, and he wasn't anybody I knew. Kinda makes yuh feel funny—shootin' a man yuh don't even know."

"Well, sir," said Frijole, "it reminds me of the first man I ever killed. I didn't know him from a side of sole-leather. Yuh see, me and Axhandle Jones was reppin' for the K Bar Seven along the Brazos. We wasn't expectin'—"

"Nobody else was either," interrupted Slim. "I've heard that tale, with variations and gestures for three years, and every time the dead man had a different name. Frijole, yuh danged liar, don'tcha re'lize that Danny's got a dead man out there in the brush?"

"Jist a stranger," said Frijole. "He'll keep."

"Keep!" snorted Danny. "We've got to notify Henry and Doc Knowles as quick as we can. But what on earth were they doin' out there? Why would masked men be watchin' the ranch-house, I wonder?"

"Shore queer," admitted Slim. "Suppose we go out there and pack the remains down here?"

"It's agin the law," stated Frijole quickly. "Don't dare move a dead man until the coroner sets onto him."

"We can go look at him, can't we? Let's go do that. I'd shore like to have a look at this supine gent."

"You look kinda white around the gills, Danny," remarked Frijole. "Don't let this git yuh down, feller. I know how yuh feel. First few I killed kinda gave me the creeps, but yuh git over it quick. Shore, I'd like to see him. Want a snack, before yuh go, Danny?"

"No!" snorted Danny.

"Let's go, before he petterfies," said Slim.

FULLY armed they followed Danny out past where they had dug for the treasure, and back along a bushy trail to a point about two hundred feet from the hole in the sand. Danny stopped and looked around. Pitched headfirst into a tangle of brush was his horse, its hind feet in the air. Danny pushed through a fringe of brush to a small opening, where he stopped short.

"He's gone!" blurted Danny. "He—he was right there!"

Half-concealed under a creosote bush was a battered sombrero, faded and colorless, but with no marks to indicate its owner. Frijole examined the weeds and sand. "Blood here on the ground," he announced. "Yeah, yuh can see where somebody in high heels lifted hard. See how they dug in deep? Danny, that other feller came back and got the dead man. Or mebbe he wasn't only wounded. Yuh never can tell."

"I dunno," sighed Danny. "Maybe I'm glad he's gone."

"Can't keep notheeng around those places," sighed Lightning.

"What did he mean?" asked Danny curiously.

"Aw, jist a Mexican idea of bein' funny," replied Frijole. "We better take your saddle and bridle back, before somebody steals that, too."

As soon as possible, back at the ranch house, Slim drew Frijole aside.

"It's a good thing we didn't find that money," he told Frijole. "Then two dry-gulchers was watchin' us, dont'cha know it? They would jist about killed all four of us."

"Yeah?" said Frijole. "Not me, pardner. When I got through with them two, they'd wish they'd stayed home."

"Uh-huh. Yeah, I noticed that. F'r a man of yore age, you can shore travel awful fast, when yo're scared."

"Scared? Who was scared? I knowed they was shootin' at you, and I wanted t' lead you out of range as fast as possible. Yeah, they was. You said yourself that none of them bullets missed yuh more'n an inch."

"I guess we're even," sighed Slim. "Let's forgit it."

CHAPTER IX

HELL-FOR-LEATHER HENRY

HENRY took Buckshot with him on the stage to Scorpion Bend, and the little fellow rode between Henry and Tony Dunham, the driver. Tony had worked for Big Jim Harris several years; he had only recently taken over the job of driving the stage. He was a garrulous sort, lean and saturnine.

It was a tiresome trip over the dangerous grades and narrow roads, but Buckshot enjoyed it. Henry proudly led the little boy around the town, buying him peanuts and candy and soda-pop until Buckshot fairly waddled. Henry talked with a number of people about the coming election. He saw Cash Silverton, who had a perceptible limp from his encounter with Oscar Johnson.

Later he met Charles Baker on the street. "Campaigning," queried the banker.

"I never campaign, sir," replied Henry. "I could not tell anyone in Wild Horse Valley anything about me that they do not already know. They either vote for me, or they do not."

"Are you going to be with us a few days, Mr. Conroy."

"No, I am going back on the night stage, Mr. Baker. Have you made arrangements to take over the Tonto bank,"

"Next week," replied Baker. "I am finishing up my work here."

Later in the afternoon Henry ran into Tony Dunham, and Tony was drinking. He turned his back on Henry and went into a saloon. By suppertime Tony was nearly to the crying stage. It was the first time Henry had ever seen Tony in that condition.

Henry spoke to the clerk in the stage depot about it, but the man merely shrugged and said, "Aw, he's a good driver; he'll take yuh home safe."

By stage time Tony was quietly drunk, but seemed able to handle his four horses. It was with a certain amount of misgiving that Henry put Buckshot inside the stage and climbed in with him. He had no liking to ride on the driver's seat at night.

Those narrow, winding roads around the Piñon cliffs might very well be disastrous for a drunken driver, but it was a long ways to the grades, and Tony should be sober enough by that time. What Henry did not know was that Tony had a quart of bad liquor in the wrapped-up slicker beside him on the seat.

Within a mile from town Buckshot was sound asleep, in spite of the lurching stage. There was no moon, but the starlight was brilliant. Henry tried to snooze, but he was still apprehensive about Tony Dunham, and dust sifted into the stage, making him very uncomfortable.

They reached the crooked roads which led to the grades above Piñon Canyon, and began the long climb. They reached the top, but the driver did not stop the team for the usual rest there. After they had negotiated several of the sharp turns Henry relaxed, deciding that Tony's condition was all right. Almost at the same moment the stage crashed to a stop against the inside wall.

Henry climbed out when he heard Tony swearing at the team, and found the driver on the ground. At first he thought Tony had been hurt, but he soon discovered that Tony was too drunk to stand up. The left front wheel of the stage had wedged against the wall; otherwise there did not seem to be any damage. The lines had been flung aside, and Henry marveled over the fact that the team did not run away.

He carefully placed the half-awakened Buckshot on the seat, dumped the unconscious Tony into the stage, closed the door and gingerly climbed to the driver's seat, holding the lines. Henry had never driven four horses, and the thought of taking that heavy stage to Tonto City was apalling.

Working carefully, he managed to back the team enough to release that front wheel, and headed down the grades, praying that those four horses knew more about the road than he did. At the first sharp turn he nearly crashed the stage against the inner wall when he turned too short.

But he only needed that one lesson. On the next curve he nearly dropped the right wheels off the grade, swinging too wide. The high rocky cliffs on the left side cut off the light, while on the right side was the mysterious darkness of the deep canyon. Buckshot was asleep, his curly head pillowed on Henry's thigh.

It was a nightmare to Henry. "And men ask for this sort of work!" he marveled aloud. "And do it every day!"

SUDDENLY the leaders swerved in close to the rocky wall. Henry pulled back with all his strength, and at the same time bore down on the brake. Something had frightened the team, but he had no idea what it might be. With the iron-shot wheels skidding sparks from the rocky road-bed, the equipage stopped.

Then the figure of a man stepped past the team, starlight glinting on the barrel of his gun. Henry was not armed. The man said:

"Hold 'em tight!"

The next moment he stepped in beside the stage, flung open the door and barked:

"Get out of there and get out fast!"

Henry tried to twist around to see what was going on, and then there were two heavy shots, spaced very close together, as loud as two claps of thunder. Henry had taken his foot off the brake, and the lines were slack. For a moment there was only the rattling echoes of those two shots, and then the frightened team lurched ahead.

It was a sharp down-grade to the next turn; the lurch had thrown Henry off balance; and his foot was off the brake. Bracing an elbow against Buckshot to keep him on the seat, Henry was helpless for the moment.

He never knew how they made that turn. He felt the stage twist and skid, saw sparks fly from the rocky wall as a hug scraped heavily, and then they were in a straight piece of grade, with all four horses running at top speed.

The next curve was wider, but he heard rocks fly off into space as the wheels skidded again, and he thought for a moment they were all going over the edge. Henry knew enough about driving four horses to know that the leaders must keep the spreaders taut, or the wheelers were in danger of getting their forefeet tangled; so he merely let them run, and gave all his attention to the brake. From here to the bottom of Wild Horse Valley there were few curves, but his brake-blocks were burning long before he reached the bottom. Luckily there was no traffic going toward Scorpion Bend, because except at turn-out places it was a one-team road.

Henry did not stop to make any investigations; drove straight to Tonto City, pulling in at the stage depot at one o'clock. Judge and Oscar were waiting for him, along with several other men who were there to meet the stage.

Henry handed Buckshot to Oscar, and climbed stiffly down. Every bone in his body ached from the strain, and he almost fell off the wheel. His story was quickly told. Tony Dunham was sprawled inside the stage, with two loads of buckshot in him, fired at a distance of possibly five feet. Doctor Knowles was summoned and his examination was brief.

Big Jim Harris was called from the King's Castle. It was his stage line and his driver. "Attempted holdup, eh," he said.

"Presumably," replied Henry, "the idea was to first murder all the passengers."

"I can't imagine who would want to kill Tony."

"And I," said Henry, "cannot imagine who would know that Tony was inside that stage. Someone in this country must have a crystal ball. Come, Judge, we must get Buckshot to bed."

They took the little boy to their room and put him in bed. Danny Regan had been in and told Judge what happened at the ranch. Henry sat down on the edge of his bed and tried to puzzle things out. Why had masked men been watching the ranch—men desperate enough to try and murder Danny Regan?

"Why was Tony Dunham murdered?" queried Judge.

"Because they thought it was I," sighed Henry. "No one, except me, knew that Tony was inside that stage, Judge. I was supposed to get both barrels of that shotgun. That was why Tony got drunk. He did not have the nerve to go through with the scheme; so he took too much liquor, never thinking that he might—oh, well, there is no cause for worry; I am still alive."

Judge cleared his throat raspingly. "I suppose you—er—have all your affairs in order, Henry. With things as they are—you see."

"One never knows, does one?" said Henry. "After all the temperance lectures I have heard, whiskey saved my life."

"You still jest, Henry."

"I am sorry, Judge. I can understand that they might murder me in order to prevent me from—well, cleaning up this mess, or to prevent me from being reëlected; but I cannot figure out why masked men should watch my ranch. What is there at the ranch that men should watch? It doesn't make sense, Judge. I believe we shall go out there tomorrow and talk with the boys—especially Danny. He is very level-headed. If he says he shot a man, I believe him."

"And he says he never saw that man's face before," said Judge.

"Very puzzling indeed, Judge. Please find me the liniment. I feel completely shredded."

THE next morning Henry left Buckshot with Judge, secured the ranch mail and rode out to the JHC. There was a letter for Danny Regan, posted at Scorpion Bend. Danny read it quickly, a puzzled expression on his face. He handed the penciled note to Henry. It read: *This is your order to keep away from Laura Adams.*

There was no signature, no explanation—only that one line. Henry handed it back to Danny without any comment.

"Henry, this is a crazy thing," Danny said.

"Tell me about the man you shot, Danny."

Danny told him the same story he had told the four other men at the JHC, and Henry nodded gravely.

"Do you suppose the man was dead, Danny?" he asked.

"I believe he was, Henry. But when we got back, he was gone."

"Because his identity might incriminate men you *do know,* Danny."

"Mebbe that was the reason they took him away. What's new with you?"

Henry sat on the porch and told Danny, Frijole and Slim about the killing of Tony and the wild ride down the grades.

"I'll tell yuh," remarked Frijole, "this country is tougher than a basket of rattlers. Yuh never know what'll happen next."

"But why are masked men watching this ranch?" asked Henry.

Frijole and Slim were a bit uneasy, but no one mentioned a possible reason. Finally Danny and Henry went to the spot where Danny had shot the stranger. There was nothing to be seen. Henry saw the hole in the sand where Frijole had tried to dig up the loot, and asked Danny what the hole was for.

"I've been wonderin' about that myself," said Danny. "Looks like somebody had buried somethin' there."

Henry looked it over thoughtfully, but he did not express any opinion.

"But about this note I got about Laura Adams, the school teacher," said Danny. "I don't understand it, Henry. Why shouldn't I see her?"

"Have you been seeing her often?" asked Henry.

"Oh, once in a while. Not real often."

"Never quarreled with her?"

"Certainly not. She is a fine girl, Henry. That isn't her writin'."

"Danny, what do you know about her?"

Danny was silent for several moments, but finally he said:

"Henry, she is Big Jim Harris' niece. He got her the job."

"Big Jim," said Henry quietly, "seems to have a hand in nearly everything around here. Being his niece is nothing against her."

"Do you suppose he wrote that note?" asked Danny.

"I have never seen his writing, Danny. Suppose you ask Miss Adams for her version of it. She may have an idea on the subject."

"I'll sure do that—today," declared Danny vehemently.

"My goodness! Has it—er—gone that far, Danny?"

"No," replied Danny coldly, "but no man can tell me that I can't see a young lady. That's up to her—not to a third party."

"Miss Adams," said Henry, "is a very beautiful and charming young lady. It may be that some amorous swain has taken this means of getting you out of the race. No doubt there are many who envy you, Danny."

"Well, that's all right," said Danny. "She has a perfect right to go with anyone she wants to. If she agrees with the writer of this note, I'll step aside, and never say a word. But she will have to tell me that herself, Henry.

Henry rubbed his red nose thoughtfully and looked at the hole in the sand. There did not seem to be a sensible reason for that hole. Around it were plenty of boot tracks, as if several men had stood there. It was only a short distance away to where the two masked men had met Danny Regan. Had the masked men dug that hole?

"Danny, there is something wrong about this ranch," he said.

"Wrong?" exclaimed Danny. "How do you mean?"

"Danny, I hate to say this," Henry lowered his voice, "but I have a feeling that Slim and Frijole were mixed up in that bank robbery."

"No, Henry! You can't mean that."

"Else why are masked men watching the ranch? Danny, can it be that Slim and Frijole in some way got that bank money, and that the men who engineered the robbery are trying to get it back?"

"I can't believe that, Henry. Frijole and Slim are honest men. I'd sooner think that Thunder and Lightning did it."

"Hmmm. Danny, you might have hit the nail on the head. Those two are just— But wait. We will go back to the ranch, take them off their guard and—well, well, I never thought of them."

CHAPTER X

LIARS DON'T STEAL

THEY went back to the ranch-house. Slim and Frijole were not in evidence, but Thunder and Lightning were down at the corral, fixing a post. Henry and Danny went down there.

"*Buenas dias,*" said Lightning. "How am I, you hope and pray?"

"Lightning," said Henry abruptly, "how much money was in that sack you brought back from Scorpion Bend after the bank robbery?"

"How *mucho? Quien sabe?* Maybe meelion dollar."

"You did not count it?"

"Por Dios, no! Too much."

"I see. Where is that money now, Lightning?"

Lightning shrugged his shoulders. *"Quien sabe?* We bury heem, but somebody deeg heem up."

"Where did you get the money, Lightning?"

"Firs'," explained Lightning, "I see Sleem and Frijole bury heem. Then we deeg heem up and bury heem again. Een copple day Sleem and Frijole say they cut your ears off eef we do not show them where we bury heem. *Por Dios,* you do not wan' for losing ear, so we show heem—but those money ees gone."

"I'll be a liar!" gasped Danny.

"Was the money gone before Danny shot the man?"

"We deeg for heem about that time, but there ees no money."

"Are you sure that Frijole and Slim did not get it?"

"They never get heem. They are sore like hell."

"A fine, law-abiding outfit, I must say!" exclaimed Henry. "Let us question Slim and Frijole."

They found Slim and Frijole in the kitchen, sampling a new batch of prune whisky.

"Well, what didja find out?" asked Frijole.

"Too much," replied Henry sharply. "It saddens me to think that I cannot trust anyone."

"You mean Thunder and Lightnin', Henry."

"I mean Frijole and Slim."

"Oh, m' God!" exclaimed Slim. "Don't say that, Henry. Why, me and Frijole would lay down our lives for you."

"I do not want your lives, Slim, but I do want the money you two got in that Scorpion Bend bank robbery."

Slim and Frijole stared at each other in amazement. Then Slim whispered, "Lightnin'!"

"Yes," said Henry quietly, "Lightning told us."

"I'll be a liar!" sighed Frijole. "I jist will be a liar."

"Without a doubt," Henry agreed. "I expect you to lie, Frijole. But I want it as near as you can come to the truth."

"I'll do m' best, Henry. We didn't steal the money. You know we wouldn't do that. Personally, I believe in livin' every day so I can look any man in the face and tell him to go to hell."

"I believe the latter statement, Frijole. Proceed."

"Yuh better make it sound good," said Danny.

"Yuh see," continued Frijole miserably, "I had a quarter-sack of oats in my hand, when I chased in behind that bank, trying to see who Oscar was chasin'. Well, somebody ran into me and knocked me down. I got up, picked up m' sack and took it back to the buckboard. The only thing I figure is that I got the sack of money instead of the oats. Anyway, it was there in the buckboard next mornin'. And that's the truth."

"I'll swear to that, too," added Slim.

"It has a ring of truth," admitted Henry. "But what happened next?"

"Well," sighed Frijole, "me and Slim didn't want them robbers to find it here; so we took it out in the wash and buried it."

"Why," queried Henry, "did you not turn the money over to me?"

"Yuh—yuh can't think of everythin', right on the spur of the moment, Henry. Me and Slim was kinda shocked, and our first thought was to hide the stuff."

"With no idea of keeping it, of course."

"Good gosh, that never even entered our heads, Henry."

"I see. Then what happened?"

"Well, we got to thinkin' it over later and I says to Slim that we better dig up that money and turn it over to you. It ain't ours, and we didn't—shucks, we never even thought about touchin' a cent of it for our own use, yuh know. Well, we went out there to dig it up, and it had already been dug up."

"Why did you not come and tell me about it?" asked Henry.

"Well, we—uh—hell, it was gone, Henry. We kept still, hopin' to nab the thief which got it. Me and Slim framed up for to scare Lightnin' and Thunder into admittin' they took it; so we put on masks and came in on 'em.

"And while we're scarin' them two Mexicans, in comes three masked men and tried to scare all of us. But I tricked 'em into thinkin' that Oscar was outside with a shotgun, and they fanned their tails out of there. Them masked men figured we had the money.

"Later on we got Thunder and Lightnin' to show us where they hid the money, but it was gone again. We was jist finished diggin' when Danny had his gun fight with the two masked men. We all beat it for the house and was there when Danny showed up."

"I lose," muttered Slim.

"You lose what?" asked Danny.

"Well," replied Slim, "I bet m'self a month's wages that Frijole couldn't tell the truth—and he has."

"BUT who got that money?" asked Henry. "One of you four knows where the money is right now."

"We don't," denied Slim quickly. "Mebbe Thunder or Lightnin' know, but I doubt it."

"Do you realize that it is an enormous amount of money?" asked Henry. "Dou you realize that the bank is smashed, and that half the people in Wild Horse Valley will lose their money?"

"It's terrible," agreed Frijole, "but we ain't got it."

"If the people of Wild Horse Valley knew that you four had been playin' three-card monte with their money, they would lynch all four of yuh," stated Danny, and added, "And I wouldn't raise a hand to stop 'em."

"Yuh see," remarked Slim, "while this here holdup was goin' on, I was up in the dance hall, listenin' to a feller saw on a bull fiddle. Shucks, I wasn't even near the bank."

Henry looked thoughtfully at Frijole. "After that sack was knocked out of your hand, Frijole, did you happen to go into the bank, before the robbery was discovered?"

"Seems t' me like I did, Henry. Yes, sir, me and Thunder and Lightnin' was investigatin' that open back door. We lit some matches and a feller out in front started yellin' that there's robbers in the bank; so we high-tailed it right out of there. I seen Baker, the banker. He said I was a big masked man with a gun in m' hand. Hell, I didn't have no gun in m' hand."

"Mr.Baker was slightly rattled," said Henry quietly.

"Yuh can't blame him for that," said Slim.

"Is there any possible chance that the masked men who shot at Danny dug up that money before you had a chance?" asked Henry.

"That sand hadn't been touched, before I started diggin'," replied Frijole. "We'd been a-diggin' ten, fifteen minutes before they fired the first shot. If they had the money, what was they hangin' around for?"

"Very good logic," agreed Henry. "For some silly reason, I am inclined to feel that you have told me the truth. I do not refer to the statement you made concerning the fact that you were going to dig up the loot and turn it over to me. That is too large and has too many spines for me to swallow, Frijole. However, I am willing to believe part of the rest.

"In your ignorance and cupidity, you have put me in a terrible position, if the truth of this leaks out. We shall all be blasted. Our only salvation is to keep silent, keep our eyes open, and try to locate the money. If it is not here, and if the masked men did not get it, we must make every effort to discover who has it. I have a feeling that the men who robbed that bank did not get the money. I trust that you boys will keep still about this incident."

"You can shore trust us!" exclaimed Frijole. "And I'll scare them two Mexicans so bad that they won't even remember their own ages."

IT WAS just past four o'clock that afternoon when Danny Regan tied his horse in front of the Corcoran home, where Nellie Adams the school teacher lived. Mrs. Corcoran was a large, red-faced, jolly woman, and she gave Danny a welcoming handshake.

"You're a little early, cowboy," She laughed. "Nellie ain't home yet. But come right in and make yourself at home."

"Thank yuh very much, Mrs. Corcoran," Danny smiled. "Nice weather."

"Yes, it is nice. Let me take your hat?"

"Thank yuh, I'll hold it. Yo're lookin' well."

"Feelin' fine. Feel better if your boss would find that missin' money from the Scorpion Bend Bank. But I suppose that is impossible. That just about broken Harry Corcoran." She sighed.

"I'm shore sorry about that, Mrs. Corcoran. Henry's doin' everythin' he can."

"I saw that in the *Clarion,* which came today."

"So he finally printed it again, did he?" Danny grinned.

"And strewed Henry Conroy's remains all over the front page."

Danny nodded. "I reckon he hates Henry. Too bad, because Henry is the finest man I ever knew, Mrs. Corcoran. Yuh see—"

Danny's eyes had strayed to the organ, on which there was a photograph of a man. Mrs. Corcoran's eyes followed Danny's, and she smiled.

"Good lookin' feller, eh, Danny?" she said. Danny turned and slowly looked at her, a queer expression on his face.

"Who—who is that man?" he asked huskily.

"Don't worry about him," Mrs. Corcoran laughed. "That's Nellie's brother, Steve Adams."

"Her brother?"

"Why, sure, her brother. She can have a brother, can't she? What's the matter, Danny, yuh look kinda green?"

"Must be close in here," said Danny. "I—I'll wait for her on the porch."

Danny stumbled out on the porch as Nellie Adams came through the gate, and he met her a short distance away from the house.

"I—I wanted to see you," he said, searching his pockets for the note he had received. He found it and handed it to her. Quickly she read it and handed it back to him. From her bag she took a folded envelope and took out the enclosed sheet of paper, on which was written:

> *If you want to continue teaching school here, have nothing further to do with Dan Regan.*

The writing was the same as on Danny's note, and there was no signature. They looked at each other curiously.

"Who wrote them notes?" asked Danny.

Nellie Adams shook her head slowly. "Who knows, Danny?"

"Big Jim Harris?" he asked.

"It isn't his writing. I thought of that, too."

"Well, what's to be done about it?" he asked.

"I don't know, Danny. It made me feel spooky."

"Yeah, I'll betcha. You don't want to lose yore job. I haven't much of anythin' to lose—except my life."

"Danny," she said quietly, "let's follow their orders. Maybe we can find out who wrote them. You can't afford to take a chance, and neither can I."

"That's right. If you learn anythin', you can find a way to let me know and I'll do the same for you. I'll pull out now, before somebody sees me down here."

Danny's face was still gray as he rode up to the main street of Tonto. He went straight to the sheriff's office. Henry was there alone. Danny closed the door and leaned across Henry's desk.

"I was down to see Nellie Adams about that note," he said quietly. "She got one, warnin' her to keep away from me."

"Interesting," said Henry. "Very interesting."

"And somethin' else," said Danny huskily. "On the organ in the Corcoran's house is a picture of Steve Adams, Nellie's brother."

"Steve Adams?" queried Henry curiously. "I have never heard of the gentleman, Danny. What about *him?*"

"He is the masked man I shot out at the ranch, Henry."

Henry's eyes opened wide for a moment, but went back to their habitual squint.

"Ain't that hell?" queried Danny huskily.

"And Steve Adams is Big Jim Harris' nephew," said Henry.

"And Nellie's brother," reminded Danny miserably.

"Eh? Oh, yes, her brother."

"And I think I killed him, Henry."

Danny turned away. He went to the door and opened it and stood in the doorway. Henry came over and put a hand on his shoulder.

"You think you killed him, Danny," he said. "There isn't anything in the world to prove it. You may have been mistaken in the man, too. However, should it all be true, you were justified. Say nothing to anyone about this, Danny. I am doing everything I can to clear up this mystery."

"Thank yuh, Henry. Where is Judge?"

"Buckshot is taking his afternoon siesta, and Judge is with him—reading the *Clarion,* which came today. He always takes it with him to a secluded spot, in order to digest carefully everything that Mr. J. W. L. Pelly has to say about us. I surmise he has plenty of spleen to vent this time. It will be interesting to hear Judge's reactions."

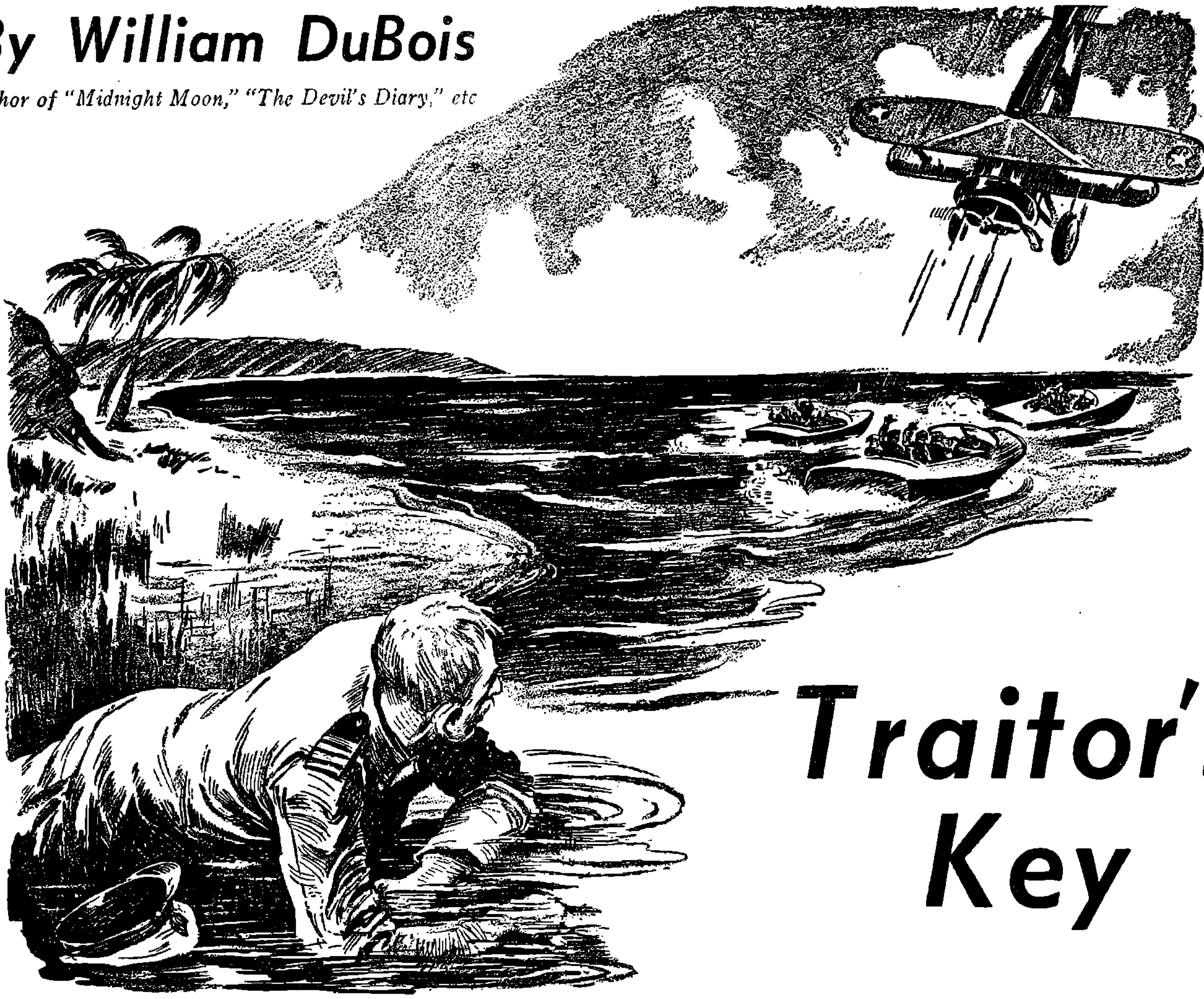
"Well, I keckon I'll go back to the ranch, Henry."

"And do not worry, my boy. Old Sherlock Conroy is on the loose."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

By William DuBois

Author of "Midnight Moon," "The Devil's Diary," etc



As the admiral watched, the bomber made a second swooping dive—this time directly above the three launches

Traitor's Key

On your toes, rat! They're trying out a new dive-bomber today, and you're on the spot. A barnacle-covered submarine on one side. On the other a playwright, a playboy, and an otter-dark gentleman named Willy Emathla. So shoot and run. . . .

I

DEEP in the palmettos at the river's edge, the giant Negro stirred sharply when he heard the throb of engines drift through the sun-parched morning. Raising himself slightly in his perfect ambush, he watched the three cars race into view: an open phaeton, a limousine with the curtains down, another phaeton. A speeding cavalcade, precisely spaced.

He watched the three cars enter the long straightaway that led across the pine-barrens to the draw. Yes, those two phaetons belonged to Sheriff Perry; the dark limousine in the middle, with the District of Columbia license plate, was the one to keep an eye on. It was for this he had waited since dawn, watching the road until his eyeballs ached.

For this, his companions crouched in the clump of water oaks to the right of the bridge, or along the reedy bank. For this, the draw-keeper lay face down in his shack beside the winch, with a neatly cracked skull.

The Negro smiled; his eyes swept the terrain in one last, careful check-up. Nothing but those three racing cars spoiled the solitude of the Florida morning; the long strip of macadam, wavery with heat-mirages, was an anachronism in a landscape empty and desolate as the day the Spaniards came.

Placing one cupped hand to his mouth, the Negro expelled his breath in a precise imitation of the whippoorwill's call.

The signal was answered instantly by a stir in the reeds just beyond the river's bend. A launch, bright with brass and the expensive sheen of mahogany, slipped out of an ambush all its own, and eased into the sluggish current to chug downstream toward the draw. As it passed his hiding place on the bank, the Negro slipped into the river to hook one arm over the gunwale. Bare as a cottonmouth moccasin, and quite as darkly agile, he stayed there, his nose just above the water-line, as launch and cars approached the drawbridge in perfect unison.

The driver of the first phaeton saw nothing odd in the fact that a brightly-burnished pleasure craft—southbound, on the Inland Waterway—should beat him to the drawbridge by a few lazy propeller-strokes. In fact, the driver cursed but briefly when he eased down on his brake.

He turned to grin at the man beside him, a tight-lipped deputy with a shotgun cradled on his knees. Their front wheels were already rattling the planks of the bridge, as they coasted to a stop in front of the rising draw.

"Damyankees cain't wait to reach Miami."

And then a strange thing happened. Instead of answering his grin, the deputy lurched craily against the windshield with a froth of blood at his mouth.

THE driver ducked forward, a split second after the second faint *ping* sounded from the shack just to the right of the bridge. Then he, too, crumpled neatly over the instrument board, and dropped his foot from the brake-pedal. The phaeton, still coasting a little, went through the automatic barrier, and came to a full stop with its bumper hard against the heat-cracked planks of the draw itself.

The man with the silencer had leaped from the shack and was running along the bank now; others swarmed out of the reeds to join him, firing up at the bridge while they ran. The launch had already passed through the draw; in that same breathless second, a giant Negro swarmed overside, lifted a tommy-gun from the shadow of the taffrail, and sent a burst into the front seat of the limousine.

But the deputies had leaped for the draw now, guns barking; two of them wasted precious time smashing in the door of the already empty shack beside the winch.

All of them turned in unison when they heard a crash of glass from the back of the limousine, and saw a man in handcuffs burst out. They saw him clear the matted hair from his eyes in one bull-like toss—just as he dove cleanly from rail to stream.

A fresh burst from the tommy gun kept heads down along the draw, giving the escaping man a chance to sound. Then the surface of the river was starred with a devil's rain of lead as the swimmer broke surface—a trudgeon kicker who swarmed toward the idling launch with complete disdain for the handicap of manacled wrists.

Arms snaked overside, to snatch him aboard; a final burst raked the bridge from end to end, as the handcuffed figure tumbled to the shelter of the taffrail. The launch, its motor open wide, roared on out of range, to take the next bend in a muddy churn of propellors.

Paul Derring, breathing hard in the shadow of the taffrail, lifted his steel-girdled arms solemnly, and shook hands with himself. He noted that the wristwatch still ticked rhythmically in its waterproof case.

"Believe or not, we rolled on that bridge just eighty-five seconds ago. Nice timing, boys."

THAT same morning, in New York City, two men sat in the back row of a darkened theater, watching a rehearsal drone its way across the stage.

The first—a tall, quiet man with mild eyes set deep in a patrician head—listened intently to the business at hand. There was an oddly military air about Christopher Ames, despite his gentle manner; something that transcended the sleek, metropolitan poise, the dark-gray lounge suit. If he seemed slight, it was only by contrast to the colossus hunched into the seat next to him: an ash-blond giant, with shoulders that would put a fullback to shame.

"Another day," said Ames, "and I'd trust them to handle it themselves. Are you listening, Michael?"

The ash-blond giant folded the newspaper on his lap. It would be unfair to label Michael Towne as a high-pressure playboy, whose millions had given him an excuse to search out trouble in more than one continent. Just as Christopher Ames could hardly be dismissed as a playwright, pure and simple. The two had been friends for years, now. Since it was Michael's money that supported Gotham Productions, Inc., he was the only person allowed to catch up on his newspaper during rehearsals.

"Sorry," said Michael Towne. "I can't forget poor Beattie. He was in my class at college, you know."

"He's been gone a whole week, now. Don't tell me they're still searching for his body."

"They found the skiff he went fishing in. Floating bottom-up in the Gulf Stream, just off Key West. It doesn't make sense in any language, Kit, having that boat turn up so near land a whole week after—"

Christopher Ames smiled. "Quite right, Michael. What shall I do about it?"

"I know we're hardly *back* from Florida—after putting Derring in bracelets. I know you've a perfect right to see this play of yours through its rehearsal period. But you just said they could carry it themselves, from this point on."

"Are you asking me to go to Key West and look into Beattie's disappearance?"

Michael Towne scowled in the dark. "Suppose I hop down myself today. Suppose you join me when you're in the mood."

Ames dropped a soothing hand on his friend's arm. "Just a moment, Mike. Wasn't your friend Beattie a captain in the Navy?"

"Aircraft division. Well on his way to being a flight commander, when this happened."

"Wasn't he in Key West for a vacation, the day he decided to take that fishing trip alone?"

"Right again. How is it you're so well-informed?"

"I read the papers too, you know. Excuse me, the director is calling . . ."

Ames went quietly down the aisle to the stage, passing a newcomer enroute: a dark otter of a man who wore an incongruous snap-brim Stetson above eyes that glowed, even in the half-dark. Michael Towne looked up at the click of heels.

"And what are you doing here, Willy?"

"A telegram for Mr. Ames, sir."

"Why didn't you give it to him?"

"I did, sir. He is reading it now, by the footlights."

The Seminole smiled, showing white, even teeth. Michael Towne's servant was a supreme example of his tribe. Indomitable, eternally proud, he had rubbed shoulders with the white race long enough to absorb both English and manners. Even the lack of accent was a part of Hospetarkee Emathla, called Willy by his master, for no good reason.

"Did you have something else to say, Willy?"

"Only that I have packed all your guns, sir. They are outside now, in a taxicab."

MICHAEL glanced up at the stage—and at Christopher Ames, deep in conversation with the director. "I gather you know the contents of that message, Willy?"

"On Mr. Ames' order, sir. That is, I opened it when it was delivered at the apartment. He said it would save time if I—packed at once . . ."

The rest was lost when Ames himself came down the aisle with a Western Union blank in his hand. "Just as I hoped," he murmured. "They can do nicely without the author's presence. In fact, I think they're all a bit pleased to get rid of us."

"May I see that wire, please?"

"In good time, Michael. I only wanted you to understand that I've been planning a return trip to Florida all along. There seemed no point in leaving until arrangements were made to receive us."

He handed Michael the wire with a grave bow. "I hope this makes sense to you. I assure you that I understand it perfectly."

Michael scanned the message with corrugated brows.

> PREPARATIONS MADE FOR YOU TO ASSUME CONTROL BEATTIE INVESTIGATION. SUGGEST IMMEDIATE DEPARTURE FOR MORE VITAL REASONS. DERRING BROKE FREE TODAY REPORTED LURKING VICINITY.
>
> DEAN.

"Who's Dean?"

"A Miami police official, with jurisdiction in the Florida

Mike Ames

keys. I've been working through him for the past week. Sorry, Michael. I didn't want to get your hopes up too soon."

Michael Towne struck fist to palm in a mighty explosion of wrath. "But *Derring!* How on earth—"

"Shall we ask that question on the spot, too?"

Michael turned to Willy. "Sure you've packed everything?"

The Seminole smiled impassively. "I have answered that question once, sir. Shall I go to the station for tickets?"

"We'll go straight to North Beach, Willy," said Cristopher Ames. "This time I think it's best to fly."

*

INSPECTOR DEAN took a wilted turn of his office in Miami, pausing at the plate-glass windows to adjust the venetian blinds against the glare of the street beyond. "Why do you keep insisting there's a *connection,* Mr. Ames?"

"At this point, sir, I'm insisting on nothing. The truth is, that inspiration came to me only when I saw the two names together in your telegram."

"Beattie was lost at sea a good week ago; Derring jumped his guards on the Kissimme bridge yesterday. How can you tie up the two on that basis?"

"Please believe me, I'm playing the wildest of hunches. You were kind enough to permit Mr. Towne and me to come into the Beattie case, on our own volition. Shall we confine ourselves to that problem, for the moment?"

Dean glanced across the office at Michael Towne, seated in an armchair with all the relaxation of an uncoiled spring. Behind him stood Willy Emathla, arms folded, his Stetson still low over his eyes.

"Does that Indian have to stay in my office?"

"Willy works with us on every job we do," said Mike shortly. "It'll save time if he listens in now."

"Very good, Mr. Towne. As you know, I'm well aware of Mr. Ames' importance in this field to say nothing of his connections in Washington. I know all about the way you uncovered Derring's ammunition dump on the Gulf Coast last month. Isn't it better to give us a hand tracking *him?* Surely that's more important than traipsing down to the keys, because a Navy captain went fishing alone and swamped?"

Ames spoke crisply. "That launch in which Derring made his escape. Isn't it true that it was seen in Key West harbor recently?"

"Quite true," said Dean, patiently. "I've already explained that Derring's boys stole it, just before they laid their plans to spring him. It was found abandoned in the Jupiter Canal, just before they took to the Everglades."

"Quite so. We won't repeat on that angle, Ispector. As I say, I'm merely thinking aloud. Suppose the unfortunate Captain Beattie was overtaken in the Gulf Stream by Derring's men a good week ago, when the leader was still being sweated by Government agents. Suppose they kidnaped him, for reasons of their own, and made the disappearance look like suicide. Finally, suppose that Derring himself appears on the scene after his escape just in time to take part in the climax—"

"What climax, Mr. Ames?"

"Surely you know by now that Captain Beattie was in charge of test flights for the new Navy dive-bomber? Don't you have jurisdiction over the spot on which the first of those flights is to be witnessed? Must I name the select group of experts who are coming out to watch those tests?"

Dean swallowed hard. "Well, Mr. Ames. I knew you were well liked in Washington. Somehow, I didn't dream—"

"Did you also know that Beattie is one of the few pilots in America capable of flying that bomber?"

"What are you suggesting now?"

Only that he might be better off at the bottom of the Atlantic—unless he's told Derring all he knows at this moment. Assuming, of course, that he *is* in Derring's clutches."

"Good Lord, Ames, d'you think Derring plans to steal that bomber?"

"Perhaps he doesn't even know where the plane is being tested. I'd pray for that, if I were you."

AMES paused a moment. "Naturally, your precautions for guarding it seem more than adequate, Inspector. Would you think me presumptuous if I suggested that you revamp them?"

"Presumptuous is a pretty mild word, Mr. Ames, if you don't mind my saying so."

"I don't mind in the slightest. In fact, I think my friends and I will be about our business, and leave you in peace."

"Not before I give you my last piece of news." Dean swaggered over importantly to the desk, and sat down on a corner of it. "Maybe I should have sprung this sooner, Mr. Ames, and saved you all that brain work. Derring himself phoned me this afternoon just before your plane got in. Long-distance, from a honky-tonk in Cuba. So he jumped the country all right . . . . Sure we traced the call: a dive on Sol Street, in Havana. Would you like to—"

Inspector Dean got no further. In fact, the Inspector had already started an efficient, if somewhat undignified nose-dive behind the desk—a procedure which Willy, Ames, and Michael had followed long ago.

The spray of lead, starting high in the corner of the plate-glass window, ripped through in a steady stream, splitting chair-backs and picture frames with a geometrical precision. The air was full of the whine of police sirens, mingled with the rattle of falling glass. Above all, the diminishing whine of a powerful motor, as the owner of that tommy gun slammed to safety.

Ames sat up on the floor, with a sheepish smile. "It seems we picked a bad place for our conference, Mr. Dean."

And then he bent sharply over the inspector, who had not risen from the floor as death passed. Dean stared back at him with glazed eyes, and made one last effort to speak, before his voice choked away to a bloody silence.

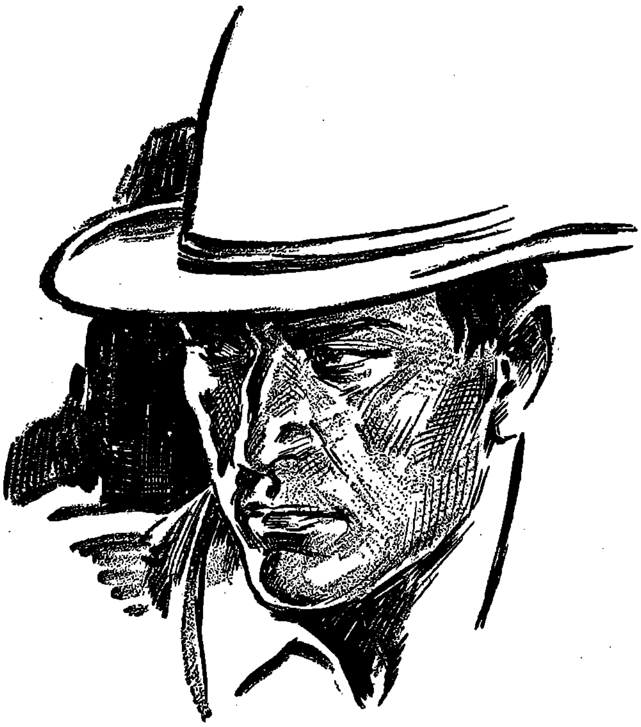
Michael Towne had already rushed to the hall door to answer an insistent hammering, as Willy came solemnly over and handed Ames a bag of coquina stone, with a paper snapped around it by a rubber band.

"Someone tossed it through the window, sir."

Ames stared at the message for a long time, while the room filled up with white-faced detectives. A bit of a menu card from a Havana restaurant, with five words scrawled across it in a bold, sprawling hand:

Come and get me, coppers

"Thanks for the invitation, Derring," murmured Christopher Ames, to no one in particular. "I still think I'll stick to my job, if you don't mind."



Willy Emathla

II

THE endless white ribbon of the Overseas Highway swept south toward Key West over the blue floor of the sea. Crouched over the wheel of a dusty roadster, Christopher Ames watched the speedometer quiver on seventy, as he coaxed the accelerator for a bit more gas.

He smiled, without turning, at Michael Towne, hunched disconsolate under a battered sun helmet on the seat beside him. Willy Emathla, completely camouflaged in luggage, rode the rumble, staring with approval at the chromatic meeting of Atlantic and Gulf on the horizon ahead.

Michael spoke out of the strained silence. "Who says that Willy and I are getting out at Banjo Key?"

"I do, Michael. If I'm not mistaken, I'm still at the wheel of this car."

"How do I know you aren't going straight on to Havana, to fight Derring alone?"

"Believe me, that brazen challenge in Miami was only a dodge on his part, to get us out of the country."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because the stupidest gangster in a grade-B movie would hardly make a phone call in Havana, unless he were planning to kite out at once for points unknown. Point Two, that spray of bullets in poor Dean's office—in my opinion—was the crudest kind of come-on. Or should we say a kind of gage of battle, now the fight is in the open again?"

Michael subsided gloomily. "If I thought there was the remotest chance of shooting it out in Cuba—"

"Take my word for it, our work's nearer home."

"You've still to convince me that we'll meet up with Derring by going after Jack Beattie. Not that I'm not anxious to dig in with teeth and toenails, if there's any hope of finding him."

"We've several points on our side there, you know. First, that luxury launch *was* berthed in Key West all winter. Second, several members of the gang were seen on the streets of the town ever since the season began. We know they've a hideaway of some kind, out beyond the Rebecca shoals. We also know that the organization has functioned perfectly, every moment of the time the leader was under arrest. If that doesn't indicate a strong war-chest—perhaps direct aid from a power—"

"Suppose I swallow all that. You've still to tie it up with Beattie's disappearance."

"I've a great deal to tie up in Key West, Michael. Really, I envy you and Willy, fishing in a dugout canoe under a mangrove. After all, I'm a dramatist, not a detective; spade work of this kind can be pretty dull, when you must manage a dozen spades single-handed."

"We could have brought help from Washington, you know."

"Time enough for that, when I've something solid to go on."

AMES eased up on the gas, coasting to a stop as the viaduct widened into an observation point above an islet studded with hurricane-tossed cocoa palms. "If I'm not mistaken, this is Banjo Key. According to our friends in Miami, you'll find a fishing village at the end of that half-moon of pirate-haunted beach.

"In other words, Michael, a secret service group featuring dugouts with outboard motors. I'd advise you to present your credentials without delay. Believe me, you've a great deal to do before morning."

"But Kit, you heard them refuse to increase the guard on the testing ground."

"I rely on your native power of persuasion, Michael. In fact, I lean upon it deeply."

"This group on Banjo Key is just a routine patrol, to make sure no unauthorized person leaves the Ocean Highway tomorrow. If you think it's a jumping-off place for the testing ground itself—"

Ames spoke evenly. "I'm relying on you or Willy to be present on that testing ground when America's newest airplane engine is demonstrated tomorrow."

"They won't do a thing to help us, unless we can definitely prove—"

"They came to Land's End fast enough last month, when we proved Derring was using it as an ammunition dump. Thanks to their cooperation, we had Derring himself in bracelets—for a time. Perhaps history will repeat at the testing ground tomorrow; I doubt it. No, Michael: I'm afraid our master mind intends to keep well out of harm's way for the time being."

"Then why on earth send Willy and me—"

"Will you let the future answer that question, too?" Ames sighed. "Perhaps, if our government were a little less complex at this moment, you and I could still be sitting in New York, comfortably dozing through a rehearsal. After all, why should I be a self-appointed servant of my country, without portfolio or salary?" Ames came to full stop, and chuckled.

"What would you have done in their places? Shot Derring in his tracks, that night at Land's End?"

"Good Lord, no. Derring, alive and kicking, is more valuable to Washington this minute than the Library of Congress. I was only praying for a government that would have the power to handcuff that sort of criminal instantly; to ship him north by army plane, where he could be questioned properly, far from an electioneering sheriff, who insists that his own deputies escort the criminal to Miami—"

Ames broke off with a snort. "Will you get about your chore, and let me start on mine?"

"Suppose you find what you're expecting in Key West? Mozo, that Black Hercules from Haiti—or Lafe or any of the others, who broke free that night in Land's End?"

"Suppose I do. It should be a pleasant party." Ames prodded gently with his elbow, but Michael was already out of the car, helping Willy unload a portion of the luggage from the rumble.

"Trust you to pick a nice, cool waterfront bar, while we get sunburned—"

Ames cut in quietly. "Get down to that beach and introduce yourself, Michael. Must I go allegorical, and explain that Death is on the loose again?"

"You win, Kit. But I'd like to tangle horns with him personally, just the same."

"Perhaps you'll get your wish, before this business is over."

Michael Towne put out his hand. "Don't lead with your chin, fellow."

Ames chuckled. "I'd give you the same advice, but I'm sure it would be wasted on a battering ram."

Then he stepped on the gas again, and whisked away into the copper-blue afternoon with his radiator cap pointed due south.

FIFTY nautical miles to the southeast that same afternoon, in the adequate shelter of a jungle-covered sandpit, a strange fish sunned itself in the declining sun's rays.

To call that fish a submarine would be accurate enough, but something less than just; at least, it was hard to tell where the barnacles of seven seas left off, and steel plates began. Identifying numerals had vanished long ago under a protecting seaweed beard, and the forward catwalk was all but choked in a slimy forest of algae.

And yet, if one looked closely, one saw that the gun-emplacements were freshly oiled. The hatch, swinging back noiselessly on perfectly-balanced hinges, was businesslike in the extreme as it admitted two men into the late sunlight.

The first of these men strode out to the catwalk to sniff the fresh air greedily: a tall, muscular fellow with that combination of grace and square-shouldered strength that went with the military haircuts and hussar's uniform of a John Gilbert in his heyday; a far different man from the tousled fugitive who had plunged headlong into a muddy Florida river a scant forty-eight hours before.

The individual who followed him, earth-worm white under his ragged beard, had a queer, sunless bearing that gave the lie to the strength beneath. Like the undersea craft he commanded, this skipper's uniform was salt-crusted, with tarnished insignia. His voice had the toneless quality of the international linguist, the man whose English has been learned beside a phonograph rather than at a mother's knee.

"So, Mr. Derring? We understand each other perfectly, yes?"

Paul Derring took a quick turn of the catwalk, cursing adequately as his toe fouled in a mass of barnacles. His eyes swept down the dim shore-line to a point where the dunes thickened. Here a shack or two nestled deep into the tangle of bay-grape. Beyond, in a kind of shallow lagoon, several small craft rode ghostly at anchor in the gathering dusk.

There was no stir down there, no sign of life; but Derring knew that fifty pairs of eyes watched him strike his final bargain. Derring spoke softly, with his eyes on the shore.

"You are asking a great deal for your money, Herr Ober."

The skipper shrugged, not all pleasantly. "*Warum nicht,* my friend?"

"Why not indeed? And you're not my friend; you're a pirate whose help I need badly at this moment. Understand, I'm on my uppers since that thing in Florida. My men are still with me—the ones I can trust. But even they must be paid eventually. That's why I've held out for an advance, until now."

"The sum agreed upon will be in your hands when you deliver the motor to this deck. Until then—"

"But I've guaranteed delivery this time tomorrow. Take my word for it—"

"Your what, Mr. Derring?"

Paul Derring's fists curled. He took an instinctive step toward the submarine captain, before he dropped his hands to his side, with a short laugh. "Quite right, of course, Herr Ober. Honor is a rare virtue—especially between pirates."

"Shall we put it a little less bluntly? My need for your help is quite as great as your need for the Czech gold in my strongbox. Once I have that engine aboard, I am allowed to proceed to my home port for a long leave. If you had spent a year in this hulk, Mr. Derring, mostly at the sea bottom—"

Derring's eyes narrowed. "What would happen, I wonder, if I called your bluff; backed out of the whole deal now?"

THE skipper's eyes strayed thoughtfully across the dove-gray water. "We could submerge, you know, long before those boats of yours could reach this spot. Once we had you safely below, I'm sure we could explain where your best interests lay. If not—" again he shrugged eloquently, "—well, Mr. Derring, while you are a valuable aid to us in these trying times, you are not indispensable."

The two men faced each other on the slimy catwalk; Derring's smile matched the skipper's in coldness, now. "Just what does that mean?"

"Surely I have been plain enough. You are not the only person with facilities for making people change their minds against their will. Which reminds me, Mr. Derring. How do I know this unfortunate naval captain can help you?"

"Will you please leave that to me?"

"The tests take place tomorrow, be sure of that. I'd feel much easier in my mind if you had your men on that testing ground now."

"How many times must I explain that I've covered every angle?"

"What of those extremely efficient gentlemen who have come all the way from New York to look for you?"

"My boys in Miami did a good job on them yesterday."

"An extremely crude job, if you ask me, Mr. Derring."

"I'm not asking you, Herr Ober. I am merely telling you that there's no way under Heaven of tracking me here in time. If those Miami police do any searching, they'll start with Havana."

"Suppose they ask questions in Key West?"

"Believe me, *that* door is carefully watched. Now may I go ashore, and complete my preparations?"

"Whenever you like, of course. You see, it is such a pleasure to talk to you." The skipper's smile looked almost sincere in the bad light. "Such an astonishment to me to find an American who would sell his country's secrets this readily. Perhaps there are more of you, yes? It will make our work so much easier, in the future."

Derring had already crossed the catwalk to blow a sharp blast on the whistle at his wrist. The skipper followed promptly, an automatic low at his side; two sailors tumbled out of the turret, their hands ready on the tarpaulin that covered the gun-mounting.

"Of course you remember, Mr. Derring. If more than one boat puts out from that cove—"

"Quite," said Paul Derring, through dry lips.

"I shall be anchored at this precise spot tomorrow, just before sundown. Will that give you ample time?"

"Quite."

A skiff, manned by a single oarsman, had already shot out from the darkling strip of jungle. The skipper relaxed, as he saw the oarsman was unarmed.

"Give the gentleman a hand into the dinghy, Karl."

Derring jumped into the skiff without a backward glance. The skipper stood for a long time on the catwalk, watching the boat disappear among the deep shadows that fringed the speck of land beyond. Then he lowered himself into the hatch, and gave the orders to submerge.

*

AMES stood at a bar in Key West's conch-town, with his hat-brim low, staring thoughtfully at an untasted beer. Too tired to think of sleep, after a fruitless afternoon with the police, he had wandered here more from instinct than with any conscious plan.

Perhaps he might find a hint of purpose in the babel of tongues echoing through the smoky room; at least, it was an excellent chance to air his Spanish. To forget, for a while, that he had come South with a definite plan: a dramatic pattern that had shattered against the imponderables of reality.

Why had he let his instinct for the theater interfere again with a hard-headed sense of men and events? True, the information at his disposal would indicate that Derring had stepped from American soil from this very port, only two days ago; it was certainly apparent that several of Derring's men had been seen in conch-town recently. From that point, Ames' pattern of action expired in thin air.

Of course, the Key West police had been more than courteous. It had taken a certain firmness to decline an escort, when he had gone out for this breather an hour ago. Christopher Ames had grown a bit tired of airtight wisdom that evening.

Ames downed his beer in a toss, and scowled back at his image in the streaked bar mirror. Derring could be halfway to Buenos Aires now, for all he knew; he would still play his hunch, until he had played it out. Not that he had the remotest idea of his next move when he walked out into the close, high-shuttered street . . . .

Key West is unique in many ways. More Spanish than American, it has the salty tang of a ship at sea, in common with all island towns. At times, it has a brooding, evil quality that is a part of those galleried streets, the shuffling gait of the fishermen, the air of its rank, closed gardens.

Ames paused at the corner to breathe that air into his lungs, after an hour of raw tobacco-smoke. At that moment, he was conscious, almost happily aware, that he was being followed.

Pausing under the next light, to strike match to cigarette, he heard the steps break off short in rhythm with his own. Turning the next corner, and doubling quickly on his tracks, he saw that two men had paused in the gloom of a poinsetta hedge, as if hesitating to follow up their pursuit.

Ames wasted no time on courage, or the lack of it. With his chin up and his eyes blazing, he marched straight down upon those shadows. As he walked, he felt for the holster under his coat, fastening his right hand firmly around the butt of his army .45. He saw the two pursuers stiffen at his approach, slowed warily as one of them stepped into the gutter with a deep bow, as if to give him right-of-way on the narrow sidewalk.

Without warning, there was a rush of footsteps on the walk, as a third person catapulted from the ambush of the poinsettas. Ames whirled, just as the blackjack descended, blotting out courage and weariness alike in a sudden rush of darkness.

III

PAUL DERRING glanced up from the marine map of South Florida waters, and rubbed his eyes wearily in the still midnight. His ears, trained from childhood to catch the slightest sound, had just detected the whisper of footsteps on the dunes outside the shack he had chosen as his workroom. Yes, they were coming up from the cove: several of them. Paul Derring frowned. He had given Mozo special orders not to disturb him when the Negro arrived from Key West.

"Come in! What is it?"

The black Hercules slipped through the doorway carefully dropping the oilcloth matting to shut off the chink of light from the sea beyond.

"Friend to see you, *señor*. Excellent friend, who hopes to surprise you."

Derring met the blaze of excitement in his lieutenant's eyes without a flicker. His father, a bootleg king in his day, had spent a king's ransom across Europe to educate his son properly. For many years, Paul Derring had been incapable of any expression save well-bred scorn.

"You know it's too late for riddles, Mozo—or bad jokes. Since when have I had the need of friends?"

"But this is Christopher Ames, *señor*. I bring him in myself tonight, from Key West—"

He got no farther. Derring had already upset table and chart in his rush to the door.

"Bring him in, you idiots! What are you waiting for?"

Ames lurched into the hut under the heavy prod of a sailor's boot. After five hours under canvass in the cockpit of a fishing launch, there was blood in his hair, and a smudge of bilge across his cheek. Aside from that, he seemed bright-eyed, and even debonair as he strolled over to up-end the table, and took a cigarette.

Derring watched this bit of business warily, feeling a flicker of admiration despite himself. He shook it off instantly, with a snarl that tried to be insouciant and ended in a nervous whine. Derring had put in a bad three weeks at Land's End, between State police and Federal men; his nervous spasms were still as unpredictable as his voice.

"Won't you sit down, Ames? Nice of you, dropping in like this, without an invitation. I still can't believe in my —my good fortune."

"Nor can I. To tell the truth, I fully expected to be dumped overboard. Why did they bring me to you?"

"Mozo is most intelligent. He realized I was getting lonely on this sandbar."

"Which brings up my first natural query," said Ames, easily enough. "Where am I?"

"On the Tortugas Shoal, perhaps thirty miles south by south-east of Rebecca Light," said Derring, just as easily.

"United States territory?"

"Quite."

"Isn't that risky, in the circumstances?"

"Quite. It's a gamble I had to take."

Ames considered, between puffs. "Naturally you wouldn't be telling me this if I had any hopes of getting free."

"Naturally," said Derring. "The fact is, my men have been using this hideaway for several months. It's useful, in an emergency. Both handy and remote, if that's not a paradox."

"Handy to what?"

"Shall we say, the Naval Station at Key West—or rather, what's left of it?"

AMES blew a precise smoke ring. "Let me see if I follow you. Suppose a certain young captain of aviation should visit friends at that old navy yard, on a short leave. Suppose he should be rash enough to go trolling for grouper and run afoul of one of your well-camouflaged fishing-boats. Would you think him a fair haul?"

"Mozo did the thinking for me," said Derring. "As you know, I was involved with law and order at the time."

Ames smiled, as he leaned forward to dunk his cigarette; his eyes met Derring's with a candid sparkle. An observer would have sworn that the two men were discussing war or baseball—anything but a life riding the balance, in that hard trap between Derring's eyes.

"Strange, isn't it, how often hunch and reality can coincide?"

"Never mind the warmed-over philosophy. Why are you here, Ames?"

"Because your strong-arm squad was kind enough to bring me."

"Did you come to Key West to hunt me down?"

"I came to the keys to find Captain Beattie. My primary purpose was to save him, if I could."

"You'll find him in the leanto of this shack, superlatively guarded. Perhaps you'd care to have a little chat, some time in the next hour. I must warn you, he has a busy day ahead tomorrow."

Ames kept his voice steady with an effort. "Captain Beattie is a stranger to me. What would we have to say to one another?"

"Perhaps you can persuade him to try no tricks, when I ferry him to the testing-ground tomorrow."

"It seems your plans are quite complete, Derring."

"Reasonably, thank you. Incidentally, Beattie has not yet been a traitor to his country. I had a dozen informants, much nearer home, who were only too happy to indicate where the Navy's new dive-bomber is to be proved tomorrow afternoon. Spanish Beach, it's called. A strip of coral sand, just thirty-one miles from Long Key, Ames. Shall I prove my point by naming the precise latitude and longitude?

"Of course, my *modus operandi* was simple after that with fifty pairs of hands at my disposal, and Captain Beattie under our collective thumbs—or should I say thumb-screws?"

Ames was on his feet now, roaring despite himself. "Look here, Derring. If you've used torture on that poor fellow—"

"Relax, Ames and don't raise your voice again. As I say, Beattie is taking what rest he can in the leanto. Must I explain that I expect him to fly the plane back to me tomorrow—with a proper escort?"

"Don't tell me he's consented to that."

Derring examined his nails thoughtfully. "He knows what's in store for him, if he won't."

AMES settled back in his chair with his voice in control again. "Don't blame a condemned man for being inquisitive but how do you propose to capture that plane?"

"The plane itself has been on that beach a week now, tuning up for the great event. Tomorrow, gas drums will be brought out from Long Key, to load her for the flight to Norfolk. Mechanics will go over her one last time, to make sure she's tuned for the brass hats who'll arrive with the proper ceremony after a good lunch at Miami. Escort of National Guard, of course, and a few secret service boats in the offing to deflect tourists."

Derring paused, and raised an artful finger. "Must I explain that I've had allies in the Guard for years now—enough to beat down all possible trouble on that beach?"

"Surely you aren't childish enough to suppose—"

Derring cut in incisively. "Since when have green men in uniforms been a match for trained thugs? I'm telling you, that beach is mine at two tomorrow, by this wristwatch. The plane stands, ready and unmanned; any pilot who sets foot on her will be shot in his tracks.

"At two-thirty, I'm beaching three boats to take care of emergencies and beat off those Federal men. At two-forty-five, sharp, Beattie will be marched into that plane with a gun at his back."

"Wouldn't it be simpler to use one of the scheduled pilots?"

"Beattie has flown that plane, in his mind, since it was in blueprints. Besides, it's better to use someone I've had a chance to work on. A green hand might blow up at the wrong moment, and ruin everything."

"Let me repeat; how can you be sure of Beattie?"

"Frankly, I think you might assist me there—if you would."

Derring's eyes fixed Ames with a cold blaze of purpose. For a moment they sat thus, without stirring, the smoke of the oil lamp a windless plume between them; Mozo, looming in the penumbra like black vengeance, seemed too quiet to breathe.

Wheels within wheels, thought Ames. He's working out that poor boy's fate, and mine, right under my eyes.

Derring spoke softly. "I've just had an inspiration. Not original, but adequate. Perhaps persuasion will succeed, where hot irons have failed. Especially if the persuader were someone Beattie felt he could trust. Think it over, Ames: you might save your life, if you persuade brilliantly enough."

Ames held himself rigid in the chair, and forced a crafty overtone into his voice. "So you want me to argue Beattie into doing what you want?"

"Surely it isn't too much to ask with two lives at the other side of the scale. Yes, Ames: his, as well as yours. I'll be generous there. Frankly, Beattie *is* an imponderable in this crude little scheme of mine. Of course, I'd have handled it differently, had I been on the spot from the beginning. As things stand, I must use what help I can get—even yours."

Ames kept the crafty note intact. "Suppose I do agree to help; would you promise to release us both, once that plane is in your hands?"

"On whatever Bible you care to produce."

"How do I know you'll keep your promise?"

Derring looked at him with a slow, mocking smile, and then he made a casual gesture.

"I'm afraid you must rely on my generosity there."

The two men sat quietly for another long moment. Then Ames slapped the table with his palm.

"Will you take me to Beattie now?"

Derring smiled again.

IV

REAR ADMIRAL GORDON SWINSCOE relaxed comfortably in the wicker chair on the foredeck of the cutter sweeping out from Banjo Key. Replete with food and adulation, smartly nautical in his dazzling whites, Swinscoe could afford to take his ease for the moment, while he turned the future over in his mind. His promotion list. The Congressional red tape that still choked the new Navy bill. The speech he would make next month, at Annapolis.

He tried a few rolling periods on his tongue: *an awakened nation, responding to the clarion call; American wings, darkening the sky; land eagles and sea eagles, flying in harmony at long last . . .*

Rear Admiral Swinscoe looked up at a dull boom from the general direction of Banjo Key, now half down the milky horizon. The ensign at his elbow snapped to attention instantly.

"What on earth was that, Castle?"

"It sounded like an explosion to me, sir."

"Nonsense. Probably a smashup on the Overseas Highway."

"Our escort seems to be turning back, sir."

Swinscoe heaved protestingly from his chair. True enough, the small flotilla of launches and outboards that had paced him out of Banjo Key had swung back in that direction now.

"Shall we put about, sir?"

"Damnation, Castle, d'you realize we must be at that proving ground in just one hour? Let that mosquito fleet handle this. After all, it's their business."

Ensign Castle was studying the horizon with his glasses, now. "I think you're right, sir. There *has* been some kind of collision on the Highway. Those Federal men are investigating."

"That's what they're paid for, I believe. Full speed ahead, Castle, and no more interruptions. Can't you see I'm rehearsing for Annapolis?"

. . . Spanish Beach is a shoal at the edge of coral water, built up by the slow drift of sand over the centuries. Mangrove islets fringe it to the west; the only approach from that side is a dog-leg channel tortuous as a smuggler's nightmare.

Easing among the islets that hot afternoon, breathing hard as the cutter scraped paint for the second time, Rear Admiral Swinscoe had abandoned his wicker chair long ago for the less comfortable business of superintending the man at the lead-line. Not that the helmsman didn't seem to know the channel thoroughly: Swinscoe was used to commanding, in tight places.

He had forgotten his speech now, to curse test pilots with all his heart. Why must they drag a deep-water man into this labyrinth? Why couldn't they hold their damned exhibit at some reasonable place—say, the Navy Yard at Pensacola?

"How much farther, Castle?"

"Perhaps a half mile, sir. There's a National Guard man on the bank. Shall I hail him?"

"Good Heavens, man! Surely we can make port without the Guard."

Swinscoe did not even acknowledge the fellow's smart salute, as the launch swept by the spongy mangrove bank where he stood at present arms. A soldier boy on parade, thought Swinscoe grimly. Handles that gun like a broomstick, the graduate Boy Scout. His mind snapped on to more important matters when he saw that the channel narrowed beyond, under a tunnel of boughs. Would this sea-swamp never end? Where was the escort they'd promised him?

There was a rifle-crack from behind them, startling as a thunderclap in that airy stillness. Swinscoe turned to find his helmsman kicking on the deck.

THE graduate Boy Scout on the bank was running now, springing an empty shell from his old-fashioned Springfield, kneeling to fire again, with deadly precision. Swinscoe spun crazily into the cockpit, as a sailor went overboard beside him.

At that moment, the cutter rammed head-on into the bank, and stopped with a mad churn of propellers, her rudder hopelessly fouled in clinging mangrove roots. The guardsman bore down on the deck, swinging his rifle like a club.

The admiral had been a good diver in his youth; the barrel roll he executed, at that moment, made up for grace with efficiency. Swimming under the blessed protection of the bank, Swinscoe wriggled to safety just as the devil in khaki jumped aboard. As he plunged into the jungle beyond, he sensed rather than saw that other figures had swarmed into the cockpit, from every point of the compass.

Strangely enough, he was not pursued. Clawing his way through the tangle of mangrove and bay-grape, the admiral burst out on a long stretch of wave-pointed sand, a sudden, blinding vista of sea. Beyond, on that endless flat surface, there was a stir of life, a confusion of shouted orders, centering about the spreading silver wing of an airplane. The Navy dive-bomber, thought Swinscoe. She's being taken before my eyes!

He ran on, gripped by an instinct that transcended thought. Now his incredulous eyes could take in the scene in detail. He saw three businesslike launches anchored head-on to the beach, with machineguns at their prows. He saw a dozen trussed-up figures kicking feebly in the shadow of a great gas drum.

Farther down the white shimmer of sand, a half-naked mechanic stood like a primitive symbol of wrath, flailing vainly with a crowbar against a bayonet rush from two sides. Swinscoe looked away, to avoid watching the man go down under the steel. A voice that was not his own preceded his mad rush, shouting imprecation to the key.

The bayonet charge had apparently ended the war in miniature; as Swinscoe ran, he perceived that the victorious saboteurs were beginning to concentrate on that plane in earnest. Eyes popping, he saw Captain Jack Beattie in a smudged uniform, preparing to climb into the pilot's seat; two of those scoundrels in khaki, agile as chimpanzees, had already bounced in beside him, to man the machine gun and bomb controls.

Still running—his right hand fumbling automatically for the gun that wasn't there—Rear Admiral Gordon Swinscoe roared his last command of the afternoon as he prepared to elbow in.

No one had given him the slightest notice, so far; each man in that group had concentrated completely on the job at hand. Swinscoe doubled a fist—a sexagenarian fist, with much of its sledgehammer power intact—and sent it crashing against the first convenient jaw.

At that moment, a swart Cuban turned contemptuously from the propeller blades and fired once, from the hip. Rear Admiral Swinscoe paused with both fists in mid-flight, a fighting bull with the sword between his shoulders. Then he coughed once, and crumpled face downward on the scuffed sands, just as the propeller took its first spin.

SWINSCOE'S mind reeled back to consciousness with red hammers on both eyelids. He found that he could raise his head a little, after a mighty effort; that he could see and hear, too, in a poor fashion.

His tunic was wet with blood, and he could feel the agonizing grate of broken bones as he lifted himself cautiously on one elbow, in time to see the Navy's newest dive-bomber take off for parts unknown with a strange crew aboard.

Even in that moment of pure pain, the admiral felt a glow of admiration, the sense of sharing in a unique moment. The bomber, after a long taxi down the hard-packed sands, cleared the water's edge with a sweet absence of effort. Then she was in the air: four tons of aluminum, T.N.T., and throbbing steel, zooming in a long arc for the far horizon, before she banked and came roaring back across Spanish Beach with her motor wide. This time she zoomed in earnest, straight for the slowly declining sun.

Admiral Swinscoe closed his eyes, and let his head fall back against the sand.

Other sounds broke in on his ear-drums, as the bomber's roar diminished skyward. For one thing, those villains were taking to their boats en masse, now their job was done; he could hear the steady beat of propellers in reverse, as the launches backed away from the shelving beach, one by one.

Far off but insistent, Swinscoe detected a more cheering tattoo: the chug of a score of outboards, mingled with the thrumming roar of a sea-sled or two. The mosquito fleet, he thought, moving in from Banjo Key. Not that they'd have a chance to overtake those three big launches now. Those scoundrels had plotted their coup perfectly, after all—right down to that explosion on the Highway, that had deflected the patrol for a precious half-hour.

His mind reeled back from delirium once again, when he opened one eye a chink, in time to see the bomber come down in its dive: a breath-taking roar, a black plummet tossed from the heart of the sun itself.

No, it wasn't the bomber, but a bomb itself . . . only this black plummet was too large for that, too dreadfully human. Swinscoe writhed away with a muted scream as the body mushroomed into the sand, a good twenty feet to the left of where he lay—a limp bundle of khaki, now, a boneless, bloody heap.

Once more the plane spiraled overhead, to go into a second dive—this time directly above the three launches, which had bunched away for the open sea. The second body, striking the sea perhaps a cable's length from the leader's bow, produced something near to panic aboard.

High on both elbows now, Swinscoe drew himself painfully into the shallows to watch the finale.

Machine-guns unlimbered slowly on those small, crowded decks; too slowly to even ruffle the plane's third dive, which now featured a spatter of bullets from the gunner's position; a scream of lead, and away for the sun again. . . . Once more, the bomber went into its dive, leveling almost at the water's edge, swooping like a black bird of prey until it was directly over those three launches, still fatally bunched in spite of the screaming babel of commands.

Chin-deep in the shallows, Swinscoe watched the apple-cart dump from above: two bright deluges of steel, a scant hundred feet above those three deckhouses. The rest was lost in a hideous red detonation that sent the admiral reeling back to the beach, with splitting ear-drums.

He found he was on his knees, now, croaking a cheer out of bubbling lungs. Then he reeled back against Ensign Castle, who had just staggered down the beach with an arm swinging useless at his side: a red-eyed ensign, bloody but quite unbowed.

The admiral swung his arm in a gesture of command, and said hoarsely:

"Cut those men loose, Castle. By the gas drum. We've work to do."

"Lie quietly, sir, for the love of God."

"So you're swearing at *me,* boy? Now I'm sure I'm mad."

V

FIVE thousand feet above the Atlantic, flying a straight southwestern course on the robot control, Captain Jack Beattie, U.S.N., still kept his eyes glued to the instrument board, long after the light but insistent pressure of an automatic had eased away from his backbone.

The unfamiliar voice at his ear—soft, but not precisely soothing—murmured calmly on; and still the captain did not budge. After the events of the past ten minutes, Beattie felt sure he had been anchored to that chair forever; without lifting his eyes to the windshield mirror,

Get this, men, if you have trouble
With tender skin and wiry stubble:
Those Thin Gillettes—four for a dime—
Give slick, clean shaves, save dough and time!
New kind of edges on steel hard enough to cut glass
THIN Gillette BLADES
Gillette
Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade
4 for 10c
8 for 19c
Save Extra Money! Get The Big New Economy Package, 12 For 27c

he knew that his dark hair was plentifully shot with gray.

"Will you not turn 'round, Captain? How do I convince you I am your friend?"

"Automatic and all?" Beattie heard his own voice from a kind of bodiless limbo: putting out his hand to the joy-stick, he dropped a hundred feet in a slow bank, merely to prove a coördination between nerves and muscle.

"It was simpler to use this gun, Captain Beattie. You seemed so accustomed to it."

Beattie whipped his eyes away from the controls. The man in the bomber's seat patted his shoulder lightly: a dark otter of a man with a mat of black hair low on his forehead, and eyes like sparks from a furnace door. Strange, that those two sparks could be so friendly.

"So it was you who gave me those orders to maneuver, after the take-off?"

"Please forgive that. We had no time for the formal introduction. Hospetarke Emathla, the servant of Michael Towne. Thanks to an accurate photograph, I knew you instantly. You are a first-class flier, Captain. Allow me to congratulate."

"But the *others?* I mean those two gorillas who came aboard with me?"

"I was forced to do a little blood-letting, Captain. First the man at the machine gun, then the man in this bomber's seat."

"Don't tell me you were aboard all along!"

"Since last midnight." Willy Emathla smiled. "Do you object to an Indian as a stowaway?"

Captain Beattie rocked his head gently between his hands. "But I don't understand a word of this. Where does Mike come into the picture? Why, I haven't seen old Mike since we were tapped for Bones together."

Willy explained, with details. "The Federal Men at Banjo Key were polite, but not helpful. In no circumstances, they said, could civilian visitors be allowed at Spanish Beach. So Mr. Towne goes fishing in a dugout—and I visit Spanish Beach anyway. It is not too easy, but I manage."

"Without a boat?"

"Mr. Towne brings me part way; I swim the rest. I can swim forty miles, if need be. Boarding the plane is quite simple, when they bring the gas drum in from sea. I swim beside the lighter, and go into the ship over the fuselage, while they are busy loading. All night I rest there comfortably, between the tail-struts."

Jack Beattie chuckled for the first time in a fortnight. "No wonder I felt a slight drag on that take-off."

"I watch the gentlemen arrive from Miami: I hear those Guardsmen talk, almost under my nose, and count the traitors among them. When the fighting starts, it is a temptation not to help; but I remember my orders, and stay hidden. I see those three launches come out of the sea; I watch them hustle you here, to the pilot's seat. The rest you know, Captain."

"You manned that machine gun after the take-off; bombed those launches out of the water?"

"Thank you, Captain. It was a real pleasure."

Beattie swung back to the controls. "Then why are we setting this course? They'll need us at Spanish Beach."

"Mr. Towne orders me to report first to him."

The captain blinked. He saw that the automatic was still very real between them. "Where's Mike now?"

Willy consulted the chart at his elbow. "He spent the night at Key Vaca. Fly this course, and you are there in ten minutes more."

"And Mr. Ames? What becomes of him in the meantime?"

Willy's jaw stiffened. "What do you know of Mr. Ames, Captain?"

"It happens I owe my life to him, that's all." Beattie spoke in detail of Ames' appearance at Tortugas Shoal; of a whispered conference, there on the floor of a cluttered lean-to.

"You mean, he *advised* this?"

"I mean just that. Can't you see it was a master's touch, sending *me* to fly the plane for Derring, when he knew that you—or Mike—would be in the bomber's seat?"

"At this moment," said Willy Emathla gravely, "I see only that Mr. Ames is Derring's captive."

"Good Lord, man, so do I. That's why I'm trying to change my course, report to Spanish Beach for help."

Willy spoke evenly. "You will hold the course I have set, Captain. You will pick up Mr. Towne at Key Vaca."

"I'll be court-martialed for this, you know." Beattie spread his hands in a last appeal. "Can't you see you'll need a cutter to storm that hideaway?"

"So sorry, Captain. This is *our* job, not the Navy's."

LATE that afternoon at Tortugas Shoal, Paul Derring rowed easily out from shore to the barnacled flank of a queer fish that had just broken surface inside the bar. Happily relaxed, and oddly content after a long day of waiting, Derring permitted himself the luxury of a smile as he coasted on his oars and watch the hatch pop open. They were on time, to the dot: that showed they were anxious.

"Well, Herr Ober?"

"Your men are late. I expected delivery at this time."

"It's five-thirty by my wristwatch. I'll wager we sight that plane on the horizon in the next five minutes."

"Are your plans, then, so precise?"

"Quite," said Derring. "If you had ears like mine, you'd hear the motor now."

The skipper swept the northern sky with his glasses, and smiled through his beard. "My compliments, Mr. Derring. And how soon can your men dismantle that engine for me?"

"An hour, at the outside. They're standing by on the beach now, with everything ready. Jacks, blowtorches . . ."

"My compliments to American efficiency. A beautiful sight, isn't she? What a shame, to rip out her insides so soon."

The two men fell silent, watching the plane flash down from the top of a long bank to level off from a raking dive, and taxi smoothly into dead water a mile offshore, just inside the shelter of the reef. But it was too far to see the dark shape glide over one pontoon, to sound instantly in the shelter of a coral spur. . . .

"Why does she stop off-shore, Derring?"

But the Navy bomber was in the air again, before Derring had time to answer; it flashed straight as a bullet for the jungle-covered sandbar, clearing the baygrape by inches as it zoomed skyward again, to execute a series of perfect barrel rolls—to level off once more at a thousand feet, and streak for the far horizon like a flash of living mercury.

"My compliments also on American salesmanship," murmured the skipper.

But Derring had already begun to scull into shore. Despite his perfect sangfroid, he had not dared to meet the submarine captain's eyes at that moment. He had picked men to fly with Beattie—picked them carefully. Had the fools gone mad, wasting time in schoolboy display?

Back on the beach again, scuffing his way across the dunes to the cove, he pulled himself together sharply. The plane was returning from its crazy whirl: his ears told him that, without the need of a glance skyward.

Derring stamped into the midst of a waiting group: perhaps a dozen sallow mechanics with crowbars in hand, captained by Mozo. Beyond, in the shadow of a dune, Christopher Ames sat smoking—as easily as any man could smoke whose hands and feet had been chained since morning.

"And how's your timetable, Derring? Still functioning, I hope."

Derring turned to slap the cigarette from Ames' lips. The plane was directly overhead now, raking earthward sharply. Ames smiled as he watched the group of mechanics scatter involuntarily, just before the bomber leveled off. Derring had already run up to the top of a dune to howl an imprecation through cupped hands; words whipped back in his face by the passing flurry of the propellers.

"Down to earth, damn you! Stop that skylarking!"

And then, as if answering the command, the bomber turned over the lagoon, and bore down on them again, with all the speed of a homing eagle. Derring raced along the top of the dune, roaring into the sky, a tommy-gun slung under his arm; from that vantage point, he had seen the occupants of the cockpit at last.

NOW the mechanics scattered in earnest, as they saw the ash-blond giant at the machine gun position, high above the propellers—all but Mozo, who faced the oncoming plane an automatic in either fist, firing in unison with Derring's burst from the dune.

Hot lead lashed the sand in the roar of the plane's passage; a clean whiff of air, faintly starred with gasoline, as some of those shots went home. Seven men went down, Mozo among them; the others ran like hares for the shelter of the jungle beyond.

And now the plane was upon them again, careless of the punishing fire from Derring, chattering death all around their flight, sweeping the bay-grape to make the tally perfect.

Derring leaped to his feet as the shadow of wings zoomed skyward. Another whiff of air, laced now with sooty smoke. The empty tommy-gun still cradled in his arm, he stood watching the bomber stagger in its course, heard the motors die as Beattie cut the power high above the shallow water of the cove.

But Derring did not wait for the bail-out. Instead, he raised the clubbed gun to his shoulder, and bore down on the shadowed dune where Christopher Ames still sprawled.

But Ames was not alone, now. A dark otter of a man stood there waiting—naked, and dripping salt water, a knife balanced neatly on his palm.

There are moments in every life when vengeance takes on a visible form; perhaps this was one of those moments for Paul Derring. In all events, he dropped the pumped-out machine gun, and charged for the beach—just as a blinding roar of flame heralded the plane's crash in the cove beyond.

MICHAEL TOWNE ran over the dunes, a 'chute ring still swinging foolishly in his hand; Captain Jack Beattie staggered on his heels, smudged but happy, an automatic hugged gratefully at his side. Both men dropped to their knees beside Ames, who managed to look remarkably serene, despite irons at wrists and ankles.

"Sure you're all right, fellow?"

"How do I look?"

"Flourishing. Where's Willy?"

Ames nodded toward the beach beyond. They all fell silent, as they saw the water marathon in progress beyond the light surge of surf. Derring was already a scant hundred yards from the submarine, where the whiskered skipper waited with a kind of bland intentness, one hand resting on the stripped gun just above the catwalk.

But Michael Towne was knee-deep in the surf now, his voice raised in a stentorian bellow.

"Back to land, Willy! *Let him go where he belongs!*"

The tableau hung suspended, for one dreadful moment, while Willy trod water offshore. And then a fresh disturbance occupied all of Michael's attention, when Captain Jack Beattie burst into the picture, tugging at the safety-catch of his automatic. . . .

"Drop that gun, Jack. Remember, you're in uniform." Mike shook a fist across the water, where the submarine captain still waited with his hand on the smooth-oiled barrel.

"Let *them* start the trouble—if they're men enough."

"Why won't they come ashore and fight?"

"Why should they? It's the *engine* they wanted; and that's smashed to junk, now. Besides, this is American soil."

And then a silence descended on the beach, as Derring swarmed aboard the submarine. They watched him go below, assisted by a cuff from the captain; they saw the hatch go down, and heard the bubbling rush of the submersion that followed that iron slam.

Willy coasted in on a roller, blowing water out of his head, and grinned at Michael with dog-like devotion.

Captain Jack Beattie, U.S.N., sat down glumly on the sand. "American soil. At least that's something."

"We've driven Derring off for a while," said Michael slowly. "That's something too."

They walked back among the dunes in a compact group, to help Ames out of his irons.

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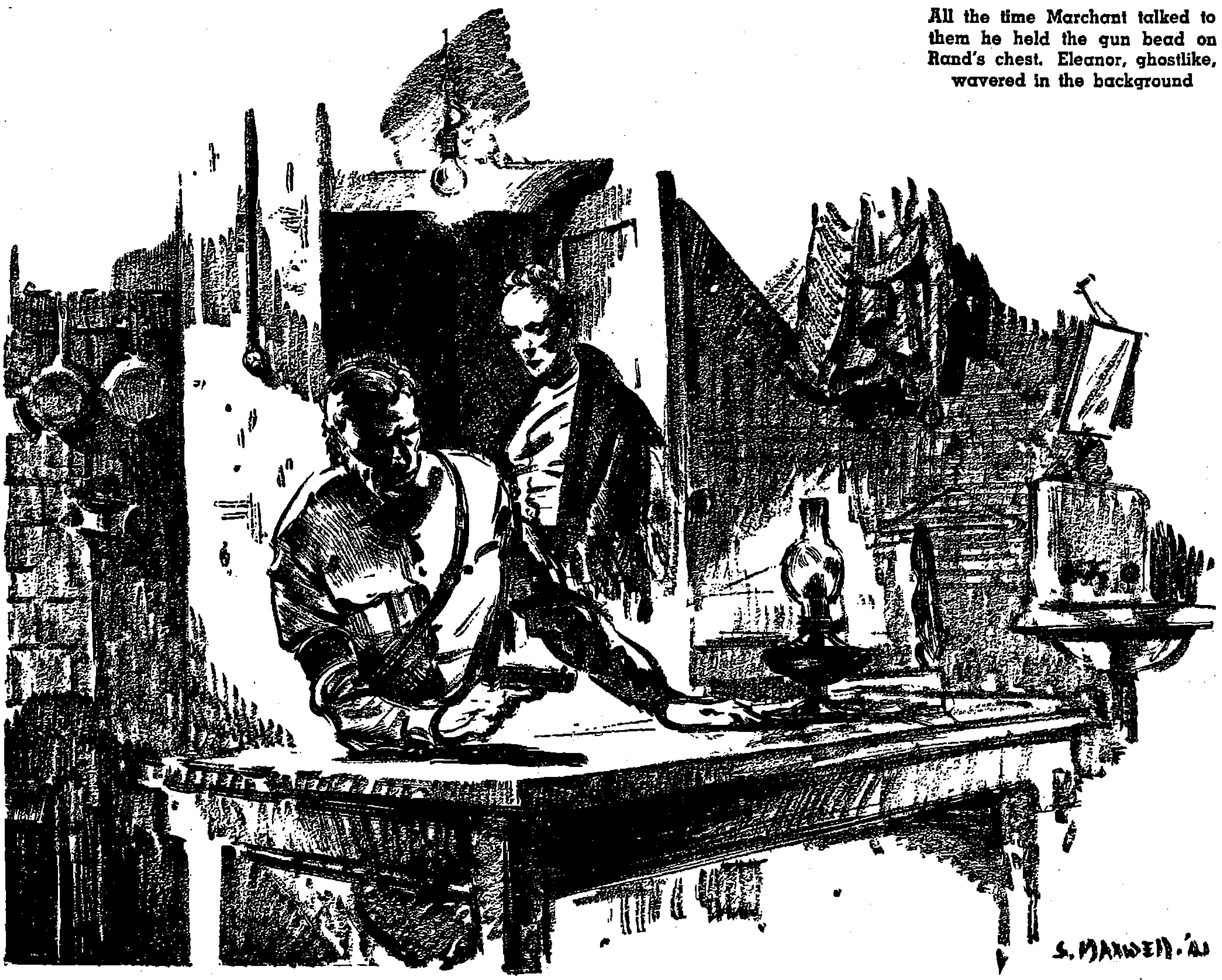

All the time Marchant talked to them he held the gun bead on Rand's chest. Eleanor, ghostlike, wavered in the background

Forward Into Battle

By Charles Marquis Warren

RAND MANSFIELD and Scotto Thorgensen, Baltimore newspapermen, have been sent to Mexico City on an unexplained assignment. From the moment of their arrival they feel the hostility and suspicion that surrounds them. Part of this stems from the aversion to all North Americans that the Nazi element in Mexico has carefully and poisonously instilled into the populace; but part of it seems directed at them, personally.

Joe Tucker, their paper's regular Mexico City man, is not cooperative. He resents their presence as a slur on his own work, but there is more to his evasiveness than that: He is definitely frightened.

He will not discuss anything having to do with Stew Marchant, formerly a friend of all three, who now occupies a prominent position in the councils of Carlito Toledarez' brown-shirt party. And Tucker is carefully servile to Felix Habig, the German *chargé d'affaires*, and obviously a power in Mexico. When Rand and Scotto meet Habig, he is definitely hostile; he warns them they are known to be spies and will be rigorously watched.

A MEXICAN lawyer, Senor Gomez informs Rand that he has mysteriously inherited the Santoyo Hacienda; but when Rand and Scotto go to inspect the property, they find it already occupied by a tenant that they are legally powerless to dispossess, because of her insanity. The madwoman is the Countess von Hochenlobe, who is in love with Felix Habig, and who threatens Scotto and Rand with dire consequences if they interfere with her residence. She is, she solemnly insists, the priestess of Kali, and a mysterious *he* will destroy them if they harm her.

Also at the hacienda is a dissolute German aristocrat, Rolf Konstantin, who proclaims his immunity from Habig's power—he has a mission that places him beyond that gentleman's sinister reach. . . . And finally there is Elsa Erlach, a German girl with whom Rand has fallen in love. She is the Countess' secretary. And she, like Tucker, is desperately afraid.

WHEN RAND and Scotto return to Mexico City, they are fired at in broad daylight by James Ferguson, an American who is a fanatic adherent of the Kyffhaueserbund. He escapes. Waiting in their rooms is General Sam Thresher who admits that he is responsible for their trip to Mexico City. Because they are friends of Stew Marchant's, he believed that they might be able to discover the identity of the Leader, a task at which all his regular operatives had failed.

The leader is unquestionably the ace Nazi plotter on the American continent. Over an enormously powerful

This story began in the Argosy for June 7 but undiscoverable radio transmitter, the Leader is pouring forth a torrent of anti-American propaganda as well as coded instructions to saboteurs. Many people believe that Habig is the Leader; but "Fightin' Sam Thresher" is convinced that he is not. And he puts it up to Rand and Scotto to find out who is.

COMPLICATING an already tricky situation is the arrival of Rand's wife **Ardith**, from whom he is separated and with whom Scotto has always been inarticulately in love.

Meanwhile **Jacob Wolf**, a wealthy non-Aryan refugee who is shunned and despised by the whole city because of a story of cowardice that has followed him from Germany, has met **Alexia Hellstern**, another non-Aryan refugee. She feels a deep pity for him, tells him she does not believe the gossip that has branded him, and offers to be his houseekeper. It is only Wolf's enormous wealth, on deposit in a Mexico City bank, that has kept Habig from having Wolf liquidated long since. And it is this same wealth that Wolf's treacherous chauffeur **Encisco** determines to secure by blackmail. When Encisco's demands become too unendurable, Wolf sheds the cowardice, imaginary or not, that has stigmatized him, and shoots Encisco. . . .

AT THE Hacienda Santoyo, the Countess' jealousy of Elsa has brought things to a head between her and Habig, for whom she had conceived a mad infatuation when he was a stable-boy on her family's estate in Germany years before. The Countess' role of madness grows more real to her, and the dementia that she feigns comes closer and closer to reality.

It had been Habig's plan to install the two Americans at the hacienda, which is the true center of the Leader's activities. With Rand and Scotto there and carefully duped by the Countess and Elsa, nobody, he felt, would find the hacienda suspect. The Countess angrily admits that she has blocked this scheme deliberately; that she will obey Habig no more until he removes Elsa from the hacienda. He slaps her and leaves in a rage, just as Stew Marchant arrives. . . .

Rand takes Elsa boating and she tells him that she is in reality a member of British Intelligence, as is **Johann**, another member of the Countess' retinue. Elsa knows little about the activities at the hacienda, as she is continually watched; and what little she knows she refuses to divulge.

After Elsa's departure, Rand hears a woman calling his name. In a tired, broken voice the woman asks him to come to see her, "to avert a great danger". Stunned, Rand recognies her; it is **Eleanor**, Stew Marchant's once lovely wife. . . .

CHAPTER XXIII

FABLE ABOUT RATS

HE TOOK his time getting back to the city. Marchant's wife had made it clear that she wanted him to come at night and the sun was just setting.

He had dinner at the Churubsco Country Club, an excellent meal of *mole de ganaujolote,* served buffet fashion on the terrace overlooking the swimming pool and golf course.

He took a taxi to the hotel, showered and changed his clothes, entering the dining room in time to find Ardith and Scotto, loitering over cordials.

He did not sit down. He put his hands on the back of the vacant chair and said good-evening pleasantly.

Ardith nodded to him, her eyes gray and searching as she watched him. Then she stood up, saying to Scotto, "I think I won't go out tonight after all, if you don't mind. I'm beastly tired."

Scotto followed her with his eyes. Rand watched her as she walked from the dining room, looking very lovely in her pale green evening gown.

"I don't think you'll have to wait for her to divorce you," Scotto said. He looked at Rand. "We were at Xochimilco today too."

"She saw Elsa?"

"Yes. And she agrees with you that you have good taste. She didn't agree with me that you're an ignorant unappreciative nut."

"That clears the way for you, her getting the divorce."

Scotto shrugged and drained his cordial. "The way won't ever clear for me. I'm not in her league, friend."

Rand was thinking if Scotto and Ardith had seen them at Xochimilco, how easy it must have been for anyone else to have spied on them while they were poled about the canals.

He said, "Pay your bill. We've got something to do."

Scotto stood up and signaled the waiter and paid the check. He had on his dinner jacket. "In this outfit? I haven't got my gun."

"You won't need it. We're going to see an old friend. Stew Marchant."

Scotto whistled softly, following him to the door. "And anyway," Rand added, "I've got mine."

IN THE TAXI he explained what he had learned from Elsa Erlach during the day; and how Eleanor Marchant had spoken to him. "So we're going to see Stew," Scotto said. "Good old Stew. I wish I had my gun."

The street lamps in the section where the taxi dropped them were at intervals of two to a block, but even in the shadows it was evident that Marchant lived in a dingy *vecindade* quarter of the city.

The house proved to be a four-story, chipped stucco apartment building and Rand lit a match in the vestibule and discovered the name *Mrs. Eleanor Marchant* typewritten on a soiled card beneath the buzzer. He pressed the buzzer and waited. After two minutes he pressed it again.

"You certain it was Eleanor Marchant you saw?"

"There it is on the card."

"I mean the Eleanor Marchant we knew."

"She's changed. It took me a couple of minutes to recognize her. But it was Stew's wife."

He pushed the buzzer a third time.

There was the metallic sound of the latch lifting and the door swung inward. A woman stood there. There was no night in the hall and he could barely make her out.

"Rand? Is it you?"

"Yes. Eleanor?"

"Who's with you?"

"Scotto Thorgensen. You remember; the cartoonist."

"Yes. I remember. Please come in."

She closed the door after them. When he grew used to the darkness he could make out the pale blur of her face and hair. She was cocking her head, listening.

She whispered, "It was good of you to come. I don't know what you're doing in Mexico. I was stunned when I saw you this afternoon. But I took the chance. You were Stew's friend. Perhaps he'll listen to you."

He said quietly, "What's happened to him?"

"Everything. Oh, everything. He's confused until he's twisted. It's almost hopeless. I shouldn't drag you into it. But I'm desperate. You'll see. He's changed so. I don't know him any more. I don't believe he knows himself. I don't know what he'd do to me if he found I was interfering with his affairs."

"Take us to him," Rand whispered.

She led the way up the stairs, Rand holding her hand and letting Scotto grasp his. On the top floor she opened a door and they went in, blinking in the dull light of a solitary electric globe suspended from the ceiling.

The room was crudely and poorly furnished. On the rude table in the center were clay dishes set for two persons, food still half-touched upon them. Tiny whorls of steam rose from the food. But there was no one in the room.

"Stew," Eleanor called softly. Her voice was meek. "Look who it was. Look who's come to see you, dear."

A door at one corner of the room opened and Stew Marchant limped out, holding a Mauser pistol in his hand, its barrel moving slowly back and forth between Rand and Scotto.

HE WAS in a brown uniform with its Sam Browne belt worn in reverse. His boots glittered. They were fine boots. Rand estimated their cost at more than six months' rent for this apartment.

The thin bitter lips were not smiling. Unwelcome recognition scowled in the gray eyes. The thin half-ugly, half-handsome face was unpleasant.

"Sit down," he said, indicating the two chairs at the table. He did not lower the Mauser.

Rand held one of the chairs for Eleanor.

"She'll stand," Marchant said. "You two sit down."

They sat down. Scotto said, "It's nice seeing you, Stew. Been a long time."

"How's it go?" Rand asked genially. He watched the muzzle of the Mauser.

"I suppose both of you think I ought to be glad to see you?"

"No," Rand said. "Not exactly. But we're glad to see you. We've been trying to locate you."

"I don't doubt it. What are you doing down here?"

"Working for your alma mater. The sheet's still printing news. Burton's still going off on tangents. Sent us down here; asked us to look you up. We hear you're kind of a mighty man."

"You're not working for Burton," Marchant said. He closed his lips. They opened again. "You're lying. General Thresher sent you down here. Habig warned me about you. He said you'd try to capitalize on a dead friendship."

Rand felt angry. He started to rise. "I don't know what you're talking about but if that's the way you feel—"

"Sit down." The Mauser pointed at Rand's chest. Rand sat down. Marchant said, "A year ago Joe Tucker tried mooching news from me. He hasn't forgotten it yet. I worked on him a little. I worked on his face."

Rand remembered the fury which had come to Joe Tucker at the mention of Marchant's name. "I heard about it," he said. "Joe was vague."

Marchant looked at them each in turn. Then he looked at his wife. "Did you give him this address?"

"No, Stew. No, darling. When I opened the door—"

"You're lying," he said. His face was vicious. He raised his free hand and balled it into a fist. She shrank back, pleading, "No, believe me. I didn't—"

"You weren't hard to locate once we really got down to it," Rand said quickly. "You're a big man, Stew."

Marchant said to his wife, "I'll attend to you later." He looked at Rand. "You have no business here. I don't want to see you. Everybody knows what you're doing. Thresher's agents from the F. B. I. and Intelligence haven't done well, so he's sent two dummies on the chance they might blunder onto something. You won't get anything from pestering me. Or you'll get something you don't expect."

Scotto said, "We were pretty good friends once. It doesn't take much to make you forget, does it?"

"Don't try that. Be smarter than that."

"I'm just observing what I see."

"But don't try it. I don't call any one or any part of the United States friend. Damn the United States. I say to hell with the United States."

"A guy said that once," Rand said. "Nolan, I think his name was. He didn't see much of it again. He was kind of sorry later on, I hear. I'm not pointing a moral, though."

MARCHANT took two steps forward. "You know the deal I got from the United States. I flew in Spain. I fought for what I thought was right. Some say I fought on the wrong side. That's their opinion. I was wounded. When they shipped me back the United States wouldn't admit me. They said I'd left America illegally and couldn't re-enter.

"They threw me out. They took the others back—the others who had left illegally like me. That's because they fought on the right side. They flew for the Loyalists. But I flew for Franco. So that made me an unfit American citizen. An alien. An alien with a bum leg I came here and I was treated all right. I got a chance. The Nazis appreciated my work. They don't outlaw a man because he fights for what he believes. And I'm thanking them in my way."

He was a little breathless. "Now get out of here. I don't want it to get around that I'm associating with Americans."

They got up. They started toward the door. Then Rand heard Eleanor's voice, desperate and sobbing.

"Don't go! For the love of heaven, try to talk to him. Don't you see what's happened to him? He's become an animal. But he's an American. He's still an American. Inside him he is. Can't you see? Please help me. Please talk to him—"

The sharp fleshy sound of Marchant's knuckles rapping her mouth cut off her words and left its flat echo in the room. He hit her again and she sank down, kneeling on the floor, her hands raised to her face.

"Listen!" Scotto said. He moved quickly across the room toward Marchant, his hands coming up.

Marchant inclined the barrel of the Mauser slightly and the snap of the shot was brittle and loud. The bullet chipped the wall in back of Scotto's head. He stopped as the Mauser leveled at his stomach.

Rand had his automatic halfway out when Marchant threw a shot his way. He felt a slight tweak at the upper rim of his left ear. It burned. Then it felt sticky. He let the automatic slip back into his pocket.

"That's better," Marchant said. He was breathing hard.

He said to them both, "Lock your hands behind your head," and when they had done this, said, "Before you go I'll give you a little of the information you tried to mooch. I'll tell you a bedtime story. About the rats and the garbage can. I never told you about the rats and the garbage can, did I?"

He did not laugh. His face became so ugly with intensity that Rand could see where women thought it handsome. Its cruelty might appeal to them, he decided.

Eleanor Marchant was crying. She said through her hands, "Please, Stew. Don't talk about that, dear. Please. Let them go if you want, only don't talk about that vile—"

"Shut up," he said.

He looked at Rand.

"You remember what I'm going to tell you. It might help you to understand. Not that your understanding is important."

BUT it was, Rand saw. There was something almost desperate under the bitter twist of the thin face. An appeal to an ex-countryman to penetrate his blighted logic and understand even if he could not condone.

"When I was young my father taught me a lesson that's never been out of my mind. It wasn't pleasant but it was the truth, and it stuck. When I stood up I was as tall as my father was when he sat down. That's how old I was. Any ugly truth you learn at that age you don't forget no matter how things contradict you later on.

"We didn't live in a good district. It was a wooden house bounded on two sides by alleys. We didn't have sewage where we were. The mayor was always going to get around to us but he never did. The alleys as well as our house were infested with rats. You know what that means?

"Whenever we went out or came in, there they were, scuttling around, jumping up on garbage cans and nosing for scraps. All breeds, all sizes; but none of them very fat because we didn't throw away any scraps we could call leftovers and eat the next day.

"We tried to catch them, or poison them; my father even shot at them with his gun. He'd been in the war and the government let him keep his gun. It didn't do any good. The Sanitary Department came down but they gave up too. They said they'd have to wait for the city to give us sewage or find us a Pied Piper.

"Then my father told me he was going to teach me a lesson. He said he was going to show me in a way I wouldn't forget why he was down where he was. He didn't want me to be in his spot when I got to be his age.

"He set his wire rattraps which took them alive. It didn't take long. Just one night and we had maybe thirty or forty, all of them squealing and breathing at us like they will when they're mad.

"He dumped every one of them into a garbage can and clamped the lid on tight and bored a small hole at the top so there would be some air inside. Then he and I sat down beside it. He made me wait. No matter how I howled or begged he wouldn't let me go away. He brought out what we had to eat and two blankets and we stayed there, ate there and slept there. And listened.

"The first day and night it was pretty quiet inside that can. They moved around a bit but they were packed tight inside so there wasn't much room for movement. The second day the noise began. They were getting hungry. They began to move. And squeal. That night they began to curse.

"Have you ever heard a rat curse? He does it in the way he breathes. They were all in there, turning over and cursing and squealing, and the ones next to the sides were scraping until I thought they'd rip a hole in the side and come out at us.

"Then the third day it began to get quiet in there. And we guessed what was happening. One of them was cursing like the devil but the others were just squealing in fright. My father wouldn't let me go. I had cried myself out. I sat with my blanket drawn around me and shivered and listened to the occasional sounds that came out. Then there wasn't any noise at all.

"My father let me go in the house that night to sleep. But I didn't sleep much. The next morning he took me out again. He made me stand at the top of the back stoop. Then he went over and snatched the lid off the can and ran back to where I was. I could smell it from the stoop but nothing happened right away. Then the only one left alive in that can came out and jumped down.

"He didn't come for us. He wasn't hungry. He was fat and he sat blinking and preening himself for a minute. Then he scuttled off into the alley.

"Then my father looked at me and said he thought from then on I'd remember that if you were the biggest and the strongest, or got the jump on the rest and watched out for your own interests only, you'd be bound to come out on top. I've never forgotten it."

Save for the quiet sobbing of Eleanor Marchant there was no other sound in the room.

MARCHANT was looking from Scotto to Rand, his eyes asking for something. Rand felt a little sick. His ear felt hot and wet. His hands ached from holding them locked behind his head. The blood seemed to have drained to his elbows.

Presently Scotto said, "You learned your lesson well enough. You're watching out for Marchant. You got the jump." He inspected Marchant. "For half the price you paid for those boots you could have bought Eleanor some decent clothes; or taken her out of this dump. You were a good pupil. I'm proud to have been a friend of yours. You're helping to train a nation of those hungry rats so they can be turned loose on your own country. You learned your lesson well enough to go to the head of the class. And your father's probably very proud of you."

Marchant stared at him. Then a piping rage shook him. "Get out of here. Move before I send you out with this." He pointed the Mauser. It shook in his hand.

"It's a pleasure," Scotto said.

Eleanor Marchant's sobbing was deep in her breast.

"Eleanor," Rand said. "If you want to come—"

Marchant's voice called, "Get rid of them!" shrilly.

The hall door opened. In the shadows of the hall Rand could make out five or six figures. He heard Marchant's commands. The men came in and three pairs of hands grasped him and he was rushed out of the room and down the dark stairs. He heard Scotto's heavier progress behind him.

As he catapulted into the street someone hit him at the base of the skull with what he thought was a revolver butt. It dazed him. He was hit again and knocked to the pavement. He felt feet thudding into his sides as they kicked him. He heard their opinions of *Norteamercanos* shouted at him. They kept on kicking.

He struggled to his knees, trying to reach his automatic, but a foot caught his chin and sent him sprawling backwards into the street where he found he was lying beside Scotto.

He saw the men go back to the apartment house. They were wearing brown uniforms and one of them was returning a revolver to its holster. Just before they went inside the man said loudly, *"Heil Hitler,"* and two or three of the others laughed and said *"Sieg Heil!"* and then they went in and closed the door.

He twisted his head painfully.

"You all right?" he asked Scotto.

"I'm all right," Scotto said; and then as though an after-thought had occurred to him, he added dryly, "Except that I'm an American."

CHAPTER XXIV

FLAMING STRAWS IN THE WIND

THEY DID not attend the inauguration. It had become increasingly difficult for Americans to walk the streets unmolested. The natives seemed to sense a *Norteamericano* as one senses a bakery a block before reaching it. The *Tide,* a Mexican-Nazi published daily, urged that any American caught on the streets of the city deserved whatever befell him. There had been several cases of severe beatings, one stoning and one shooting in which an American tourist and his wife were both wounded painfully.

Rand would not permit Ardith to go among the crowds in the Zocalo for the inauguration ceremonies and neither he nor Scotto thought it wise to leave her alone while they attended.

The *Tide* applauded the fact that Mexico was at last shucking the American yoke and reiterated Germany's avowed intention to stand behind the Republic's struggle to sever the hand that grasped its throat.

Joe Tucker, dropping by, explained the happenings at the inauguration.

"It went off comparatively quietly. There was some bombing on the part of the *Cázanistas.* There are always the *pistoleros.* But the police and soldiers suppressed these. There haven't been more than two hundred fatalities. That's quite good for an inauguration; especially this one.

"But the United States sent down a commissioner as evidence of official recognition of the Comecho administration and that's where most of the trouble was. The brown shirts got at him on his way to the embassy and nearly turned his car over. They mobbed him at the embassy but he got out the back way and escaped to the residency and they couldn't find him.

"Several shots had been fired at him. His guards didn't put up anything that resembled protection. But I can't cable any of this.

"My story will contain the usual muck about civilian riots. There won't be any indication in the American papers that the mob wore brown shirts; or that the riot was organized by the Nazi *chargé d'affaires*, Felix Habig. The AP and UP won't carry any more than my stuff will. It all goes through Habig's office before it crosses the border."

"Did you see Fraülein Erlach?" Rand asked.

Tucker looked at him. His small blue eyes were shrewd. "Yes. She stood at Habig's side while Del Rio took the oath. She stood with Habig while he and Del Rio and Toledarez reviewed the LWPM military parade. As his secretary, of course. And it was quite a parade."

Rand returned Tucker's gaze. "Then Del Rio has suddenly lost his dislike of the Nazis?"

"I wouldn't know."

Scotto said, "It's too bad you can't get the real story through to the United States. It would make interesting reading."

"I want to live," Tucker said. "In a few weeks there won't be so many Americans doing it here."

"Doing what?"

"Living," Joe Tucker said.

WITHIN two weeks the tacit suggestion for the exacuation of all Americans from the Republic of Mexico was issued by Del Rio. Rand was not surprised to learn that the American ambassador had been recalled. With the actual storming and burning of the embassy and the severe injuries sustained by both military and naval attachés, even Washington could not overlook the insults.

But he learned through the G-man Frank Dana Brady that the majority of the United States people did not take the event seriously. They could not conceive of the Mexican, romantic and primitive, turning into a menace.

"The General informs me that the papers finally printed the truth about the Nazi organization down here," Frank Dana Brady said; "but the public becomes alarmed for three days and then forgets it. He says half of them are concerned only with the war in Europe, and the other half with whether the East's selection will win in the Rose Bowl."

"Have you unearthed anything at the hacienda?"

"Not yet. It's a good thing you valued Fraülein Erlach's life and didn't go out there to investigate. They'd have spotted you. Each time I've gone out those Gestapo whitecoats watch me from no farther away than two feet. I've struck up an acquaintance with one of the peon families who work on the place and now I visit them. But I have to sit in their dirty wattle-walled hut every minute I'm there, and one of those whitecoats sits with me."

"Then I'll have to find another way. I've got to know what goes on out there."

"No. I've just been out during the daytime. I'm going to visit this José Acuna family at night. I'll have a better chance of slipping those whitecoats after dark."

"It'll be risky. Especially alone."

"But safer than if we both went and got caught."

"I've been thinking it over, but I can't figure what goes on. At first I thought it was radio, but there are no towers."

"I'll have something to report soon as I get a chance to look around at night. Meantime, the General's in a stew. Yesterday he spoke to the House about sending all this aid to England and ignoring a kettle boiling in our own backyard. Congress and the press called him a busybody and said he ought to trade his soapbox in for his old empty rifle and bayonet and come down here and put a leak in the kettle. You can see why he's hollering for us get something."

MEXICO CITY, Rand saw, had turned into an almost totally different place since the day he had first set foot in it. The change was as astonishing as it was evident. It made itself apparent in a thousand different ways.

Brown-shirted troops paraded through the streets from early morning until after midnight. As yet no weapons were visible, with the exception of the 45 mm. guns jutting from the tanks and armored cars. But the troops handled their staves and wooden replicas awkwardly now, as though they were used to heavier ones.

Nazi flags were being sold on every street corner and in every store. The swastika flew from public and private buildings in plain evidence.

Tommy informed him that in most of the peon schools the students believed Hitler to be the President of Mexico; German instructors taught them of the danger which prevailed across the border, the greatest of which was the habit the *Norteamericanos* had acquired of intermarrying with Negroes, so rapidly that the white race would soon disappear and the Republic of Mexico would be overrun with dark savages.

High school students, he reported, were imbued with the belief that God was on the side of Hitler, a fact that was proved by His granting Germany the exclusive honor of becoming the only country ever to produce two geniuses in a single century: Bismarck and Hitler.

Advanced students in the universities learned the trend of further North American diplomacy: to lure Germany into the war and use Mexico as a battlefield. To escape the demolition of their country, Tommy related, Mexicans were offered the "path of courage," which was to strike first and thus provide a battlefield in the United States.

In motion picture houses the public was invited free to witness North American newsreels depicting the United States' feeble attempts at conscription. Brown-shirted Mexicans roared with delight at the maneuvers of *Norteamericano* soldiers moving behind lumbering ice-wagons labeled "tanks" and feeding beer-can "shells" to a wooden structure marked "anti-aircraft gun," and carrying wooden oblong blocks with the words "automatic rifle" stenciled upon them.

The Mexican scowled when he read Herr Habig's account of the United States' completion of a crooked deal wherein it traded Great Britain destroyers for air bases.

The Leader's voice came over the radio with its calm assurance: "Would our *Fuehrer* sit back and accept this gross transaction, this open act of aggression, with a passive indifference if it did not suit his plans? Remember, men of the Bunds, men of America, these half a hundred destroyers have been provided by the United States government to hunt down and fire upon the ships of your Fatherland. Your Leader does not forget it. Nor must you."

And day and night, outside of Mexico City's great plateau, Toledarez and an expatriate American named Stewart Marchant, assisted by German officers and Mexicans who had completed military studies in Berlin, drilled an army which Rand found he was prohibited from visiting, but which he could hear clearly, as could all the city, when its guns spoke in a low, rolling thunder that was close to the earth.

One other piece of information Tommy furnished. It was important but it merely added to the confusion which mounted daily.

"The *granaderos* to the north are selling their cattle," Tommy told him; and when the owners of the big haciendas sold their live stock for ready cash it meant revolution was in the air.

CLEARLY this infallible sign indicated that Cázan, defeated candidate who was reported massing his troops and supporters in the vicinity of Monterey, was ready to begin his swoop of retaliation. The *granaderos* did not look with pleasure upon having their cattle furnish the marauding revolutionists with food. So they were turning their beasts into money that could be buried secretly and hastily.

Daily reports from outlying bullet-spattered states told of the clashes between stubbornly loyal *Cázanistas* and Federal troops. In some instances the troops had openly gone over to Cázan and pledged him their allegiance. In the city itself small groups of defiant Cázan supporters marched through the streets carrying placards on poles which denounced Del Rio as the "Mexican Quisling," accusing him of selling out to the Nazis once his position was assured.

But Miguel Diego, Tommy's brother, denied these accusations. He lay on the shabby couch in the small room to which Tommy had led Rand, and looked at them with sullen eyes smoldering in the pale face. He had not yet recovered completely from the wounds received in the boulevard massacre.

"No, these things they say of Del Rio are not true," he said, his breathing seeming to hinder his speech. "And I, who give my allegiance only to Mexico and Cázan, say they are not true. Del Rio does not betray his people and hand our country knowingly to the Nazis. It is just that in his love for his country lies his weakness.

"Look at his eyes. The sad eyes of a man who would do much, but is blind with love. He believes that Germany is truly anxious to see justice done to Mexico. He believes that Habig and Toledarez built this great war machine with the interests of preserving Mexico's independence and safety at heart. Until now he has not allowed *Heil Hitler!* to be uttered in his presence; it could only be *Viva Mexico!* that was said. But Herr Habig has convinced him that Hitler is Mexico's friend in its time of unrest with the United States. So *Heil Hitler!* is Mexico's cry."

Miguel looked at the cracked ceiling, his effort to speak having tired him visibly. But his eyes contained a fierce burn.

"But the eyes of Cázan. Look at those eyes if you would see the eyes of Mexico, *señor*. There is the fire of wanting to do what is right. He did not make an empty show of his aversion for the Nazis. But they knew better than to let him get elected. He would have driven them from Mexico or buried them here. He knows Mexico. He *is* Mexico."

He raised himself upon his elbow, his breathing sounding harsh and obstructed.

"*Viva Cázan!* March down from Monterey. Drive out these Nazi monsters . . . Death to Habig! . . ."

Tommy eased him back upon the rolled dungarees serving as a pillow. He spoke soothingly in Spanish and put four pesos in his brother's hand.

"He must eat," he explained simply. "And a doctor must be paid in advance or he will not attend a man who does not wear brown." He glanced at the pale face beneath him. "He is tired; but not seriously ill, I think."

"Then let's let him rest," Rand said. He put ten more pesos on the foot of Miguel's bed and they went out.

TOMMY drove as quickly as possible through the heavy blind traffic of Juarez Avenida. Rand kept himself hunched as far back in the rear seat as he could. He had learned upon several occasions that it was wiser not to flaunt his nationality in the streets. Stones had been thrown and you never could tell until too late whether the missile spinning at you was a stone or a German-made Krupp grenade. British and American cars alike were provocative targets for brown-shirted marksmen. And he had heard that the punishment for killing an Englishman or an American had recently been reduced from thirty days in jail to ten.

Tommy slowed the car to a halt to permit a thick line of troops to cross Juarez and continue up Balderas. They laughed and sang as they marched and convivially ignored the commands which their white-complexioned officers shouted at them in German.

Suddenly four or five of them broke ranks altogether and made for the sidewalk where lines of cheering natives watched the parade.

The soldiers were shouting and grasping their wooden staves as though they were bayonetted rifles. The crowd gave way before them, laughing, leaving three figures almost underneath the feet of the soldiers. Two women and a man.

Rand saw by their skins and clothes that they were Americans even as he heard the crowd's laughter turn to excited angry shouts. The three stood transfixed as though unable to comprehend that their nationality as well as their presence had been discovered.

Rand swore. Then he shouted at them. They did not appear to have heard. The United States had officially warned all citizens to leave Mexico, thus relieving Washington of the responsibility of the minor outrages that would inevitably occur when such a state of unbalance existed between the two countries. But there was always a type of American tourist to hang on with an imprudent tenacity and disregard the orders until too late.

These, Rand saw, were obviously of that type. They were not making any attempt to resist. They stood perfectly still, submitting to the soldiers. The soldiers crowded about them and their staves could be seen rising and falling above their heads. The crowd backed away for a moment to let a body sink to the pavement and Rand saw it was the man, and he was either unconscious or dead. His face and head were red and wet where he had been beaten.

Then the soldiers surrounded the two women, laughing.

Rand had seen that one was middle aged and one was young and rather pretty. He thought they might be mother and daughter and he thought the husband and father probably lay dead at their feet.

He felt himself trembling like a wet dog. He saw a part of a woman's dress shoot up above the heads of the crowd and then spread out and appear to float. One of the native women caught it and ran off, laughing. Another garment followed the first.

He felt sick. He started shouting at Tommy as he opened the door. "Keep the motor running!"

Tommy shouted, "No, Mr. Rand! You can't help. If they take you your work will be for nothing . . . ." He saw the futility of his words and reaching forward, released the hand brake and stamped his foot on the accelerator.

The car leapt ahead as though a giant foot had kicked it from behind. Rand, caught in the act of getting out, was thrown back against the leather of the rear seat.

"Damn you, stop the car!"

But Tommy had the Packard shooting ahead and his fist, pressed down upon the horn, caused both the line of spectators and the tail-end of the troops to scatter before the moving car.

Rand had a fleeting glimpse of the two women. The soldiers' attention had been diverted by the car's noise and movement and the women were running swiftly down the street. Their hair was streaming wildly behind. But he saw them make a taxi and saw the taxi darting down Juarez. He had the quick thought that the taxi driver for the first and last time in his life had been offered a thousand pesos to drive for perhaps five or ten blocks.

Even a loyal member of the anti-American SWPM sould not afford to reject that kind of money . . . .

CHAPTER XXV

SCRAP OF PAPER

BEFORE returning to the hotel, Rand had Tommy drive him to the residential district surrounding the National Monument. Miguel Diego had supplied him with the address of James Ferguson and he thought he would reconnoiter as much as possible without bringing attention to himself. For the first time in his life he felt inclined to conceal from everybody he saw the fact that he was an American.

Ferguson lived on the top floor of a smart appearing apartment house. The native clerk in the small lobby said he wasn't home.

"When do you expect him?"

"One never can be sure, *señor*. Sometimes it is the days he is away."

"I'll wait for a while."

"You sit here in lobby."

"No, I'll go upstairs."

"No chairs in the hall upstairs, *señor.*"

"I have a key. Jimmy left me his key."

He and Tommy climbed the stairs, conscious of the clerk's suspicious eyes.

The skeleton key, which had served him on assignments when stubborn relatives refused to furnish the *Record* with photographs of the deceased of famous or notorious, served to open the lock in Ferguson's door.

He entered cautiously, holding his automatic in his coat pocket. But a hasty search through the four rooms revealed that the clerk had told the truth. The apartment was empty.

They made a quick but systematic search of each room for letters, papers or any article which would bring Ferguson's identity and work to light. But there was nothing.

Besides towels and shaving necessities in the bathroom there was no indication that the man made his home in the apartment. There were no clothes in the cupboards or chest of drawers; the kitchen was empty of provisions. The entire place was devoid of the small telltale signs which show that a place is in use.

"This apartment is evidently a front," Rand said. "He sleeps here and that's all."

Tommy grinned. "Yes, that is all. There is not even a woman's touch here."

Rand put his automatic away and looked at Tommy. "How old are you?"

"Seventeen, sir."

"You're precocious."

"Sir?"

"Mature. You know things you ought to be hazy about at seventeen. How old were you at Stanford?"

"Fifteen and sixteen, sir. But I was backward. In my country it is the custom to graduate from the university at sixteen."

Rand said, "Let's get out of here."

WHEN they arrived at the hotel they saw a militant group of brown shirts pressed in a tight angry circle on the pavement in front of the entrance. They were shouting and waving their staves in menacing gestures.

They parted briefly when a tall Mexican in their center raised his voice above the clamor and spoke to them angrily. Rand had a glimpse of Scotto's face when they parted but the view was immediately shut off as the crowd surged in again.

"Drive half a block down the boulevard and wait for me there," he told Tommy.

He got out of the car and went toward the crowd. He put his hand in the pocket that contained the gun and shoved his way roughly through the crowd. The brown shirts parted in surprise and before they recovered he had made his way to the center of the circle.

Scotto gave him a brief nod. "The marines have landed," he said. And then quickly, "Leave your gun in your pocket or they'll pile on us."

Ardith looked up at him. She was sitting on her upended suitcase. Her legs were crossed and the beginning of a debonair smile tugged at her lips. But it didn't quite come off. She was frightened. She was holding a folded white document tightly in her hand as though she were afraid someone would take it from her.

"What goes?" Rand said. "The car's down the street."

"We'd better not push through these apes until El Goofo gives us the go-ahead," Scotto said. He was grinning for the benefit of the scowling dark faces but he had his hand in his right coat pocket.

Rand looked at the tall Mexican who was speaking to the crowd. He recognized the tragic face resembling Edgar Allen Poe's. It was the lawyer, Señor Gomez.

Gomez stopped speaking and turned to Ardith. He said quickly in English, "I think they will let you through now. But do not move quickly. I have told them that you are on your way out of Mexico. I have told them that it is better to let you go so that you may tell your countrymen at home what Mexico thinks of them."

Ardith stood up. Rand took her suitcase. "Thank you," she said.

"No hay de que," Gomez said. "It is nothing. Your generous fee has more than paid for my assistance. I hope only that they do not change their minds before you are out of sight."

Rand looked at the suitcase in his hand. "Where's our stuff?"

"They didn't take our skins," Scotto said. "But that's all they didn't take. You'd better start walking."

A narrow lane parted for them. Rand could smell the sour hotness of the crowd's breath as he walked. Someone snatched his hat and another gave him a shove and he was kicked in the legs twice.

"Death to the *Norteamericanos,*" a voice in the rear called in poor English.

He took Ardith's arm as they walked down the boulevard. He felt the tautness of her arm. "Don't start running," he said. "Walk slowly."

They were nearly to the car when the crowd began to shout and start after them. Evidently it had changed its mind.

TOMMY had the doors open and the motor running. They scrambled into the back seat as the car spurted forward. There was the sound of a shot and they heard the bullet hit the rear of the car. Then Tommy had it going down the boulevard, foot pressed against the floorboard.

"Where to?" Scotto asked.

Rand said, "Don't we live there any longer?"

"We don't live anywhere in Mexico City, friend. We've paid enough in rent in the last two weeks to keep us there a year and a half. But here we are. They worked the French Key act. When I offered them fifty pesos to open the doors to our rooms and let us get our stuff they accepted the money but informed us that our luggage and clothes would just cover the bill."

Ardith's fingers pressed Rand's arm. "I have a present for you," she said gently.

"Present?"

She opened his hand and placed hers over it. When she took her fingers away he saw her small gold wedding band in his palm.

"It's the first time I've had it off." She looked away. Her voice was soft. "I even bathed with it on." She looked at him and smiled. The smile wasn't very good. "Señor Gomez brought me this." She held up the white document in her hand. "It's final. I received permission to use my own name. I thought you'd want it that way."

He didn't answer. There had never been a time when he didn't think of her as Ardith Porter.

"You'll take a plane home?" he asked.

"The airlines have canceled all trips."

"Train?"

"The last three trains on their way up to the border have been blown up," Scotto said. "Do you want her on one of those?"

"Why were they blown up?"

"The brown shirts blame it on Cázan's revolutionists. But *Cázanistas* don't go through the derailed cars shooting any live Americans they find."

Rand looked at Ardith. "I'll find a way out for you somehow." He looked at the ring in his palm. He closed his fingers over it. "Take this. As a memento or something."

"No." Her voice was hardly audible. "I don't want it."

Inconspicuously he put his hand outside the car and opened his fingers. Then he withdrew his hand.

Presently he said, "We've got to go somewhere. We can't keep riding around in the car all day and night."

Scotto shook his head.

"There isn't a place in Mexico City would accept us. We're poison."

Rand said, "There's a chance at one place."

"Even a chance is better than nothing," Scotto said. "I'm beginning to feel like Joe Tucker."

"Turn right at Exposicion," Rand said to Tommy.

Aridth hunched herself in the seat and watched the boulevard as though intensely interested in its majestic line of ahuehuete trees. Now and then she swallowed. But her eyes were quite dry.

CHAPTER XXVI

NEVER AGAIN TO RUN

THE sun had set and the purple twilight had been superseded in the patio by the deeper mauve of evening. Now the three walls of the villa enclosing the patio looked white only where the strips of light from the window caught it.

Jacob Wolf turned away from the window and watched Alexia as she bent her head over the sewing she was doing. The light from oil lamp seemed to go up through her dark hair, gilding each strand. Her face was pursed with concentration as she worked the needle. She was mending his shirt. She had nearly used up the shirttail, mending it so often.

He wore his coat over his naked shoulders. The shirt was the only one he had. She could buy feminine apparel and household essentials but a masculine purchase would draw suspicion.

He walked across the room and bent and kissed the back of her neck. She held her work in one hand and put the other up and drew his face to hers and kissed his lips.

He smiled at her. "You are not unhappy, Alexia?" he asked.

"I am more than happy," she said. "I am content. That is because I have you."

"You are not afraid of . . . what is downstairs?"

She frowned. "I do not think of it."

"It has not altered your opnion of me?"

"I am proud that you could do it when it was necessary."

"It was not easy to do."

"Killing is easy for only a few."

He watched her face. She smiled and went back to her sewing. He moved to the imitation leather easy chair and sat down. He liked watching her mend his things with her frowning concentration.

But it made him think of Paula when his wife had bent over her interminable embroidery and he did not wish to recall Paula.

THERE was now only one mental picture of Paula which persisted with him. It was the day he had fled Germany. For months he had gone apparently unmindful of the manner in which he was treated in his own office by his own employees, and of the brutal treatment accorded him on the streets if he were recognized and caught by any of the storm troopers or S. S. guard or merely poor civilians who begrudged him his wealth.

Day by day he had liquidated his finances and withdrawn his money from the Munich branch of the Bank of Paris in sums that were not obvious. He had dispatched them to Paris by one of his few remaining employees who had not yet permitted the National Socialist Party to usurp the gratitude he bore Jacob Wolf.

So when he knew he was walking home from the office for the last time he said a silent goodbye to the Ludwigstrasse and the Hofbrauhaus and the Isar River which ran through the city of Munich, and to the Town Hall whose clock played *The Last Rose of Summer* each hour while tiny Tyrolean figures came out to dance and to fascinate him after all the years he had spent watching them.

"I am ready, Paula," he told his wife. "There is no time to pack. Do not bring suitcases. Dress the children as though they were going for a walk in the *Botanischer Garten.* Do not delay."

Paula's beautiful face became shrewd instead of excited.

"But the money, Jacob. You cannot leave it here."

"I have it. All of it. Or nearly all." For some reason he had not confided in her. She did not know that most of the Wolf fortune had been removed to Paris.

"Just one moment and I shall have the children ready." Her voice was breathless but her eyes contained that shrewd light.

He never knew what prompted him to follow to her bedroom and stand at the door, listening while she phoned her father and was evidently assured that Schutz Staffel guards with bayonets would be sent at once to intercept his money and him.

He did not remain to let her know that he had discovered her. He did not stop for Richard and Liesl. They despised him and would not leave without Paula in any case.

He made a dash for the station and saw the black uniforms swirl around the Karlsplatz as the train pulled out.

Somewhere, before the train reached the next station, he jumped. He had no wish to be on the train when it was stopped and searched.

Money hired him a car and money succeeded where all else must have failed in bribing the peasant family to smuggle him across the border and into Zurich. From there it had not been so difficult to reach Paris.

He paid no attention to the glaring eyes of the world when the news was published that Paula and young Richard and small Liesl had been interned at a concentration camp until he returned with his fortune. The white-haired, iron-mouthed father of Paula who was so high in the Party would not permit harm to come to his daughter and her children. It was merely propaganda, designed to shame him into returning. He wondered why he had never revealed the truth of the matter to anyone but Alexia.

It was, he supposed, due to his natural repugnance for excuses.

NOW he sat watching Alexia, content in the brief happiness she had brought to him, which would last only a few days more at most; because the government from which he had fled would now require no more than a few days to ascend to power in this country. The country, blind and misled, was eager for that ascension.

He heard the sound of the car faintly but was not disturbed by it. When it grew louder he stood up and went to the drawer of the crude Mexican table and took out the Luger.

Alexia had put down her sewing and was watching him. She made no other move until he nodded to her and then she blew out the oil lamp.

In the darkness she could not tell where he was. He was light on his feet. Since she had been feeding him regularly he had regained his strength and he was normally a strong man for all his leanness. Unless a party of armed soldiers or brown shirts were coming she did not doubt his ability to handle the situation.

Nevertheless, the knock on the door, after a long five minutes of silence, startled her. This was the topmost house on Chapultepec Heights, nearly a quarter of a mile above the last of the clustered houses of the colony down the road. No one came to this villa by mistake.

Outside a voice called, "Jacob Wolf. Jacob Wolf! Is anyone in there?"

Wolf did not answer. She wished she knew where he was. He might not even be in the room. He could have gone out through the back and circled about the villa and come into the patio behind whoever was at the door.

In a moment she heard his voice outside saying, "Put up your hands, all of you," and she knew that that was what he had done.

She heard voices talking in lowered tones. Her skin was very cold. Then she heard Jacob's voice call with a reassuring clearness, "Open the door, Alexia. It is all right;" and she fumbled a moment with the matches before her hands steadied and she was able to light the lamp.

She moved to the door and unbolted it and threw it open.

SHE saw the woman first. She noticed the hair, almost as dark as her own, and how it managed to look groomed although it had been untidied by a blowing wind. She noticed the indescribable air of breeding which she wore despite her obvious fright, carelessly, like a jacket and skirt of fine, worn tweeds.

There were two men; one, a tanned-faced, shaggy-haired dark giant with a rueful twist to his humorous mouth; and the other, a blond man almost as tall, but lean and with large brown eyes in his nicely boned face.

Jacob introduced them. They were Americans and they had been evicted from their hotel. There was no place for them to go.

The blond man turned back to the door, opened it and called into the darkness, "Drive it around back, Tommy. We don't want it seen. There's a garage in back. It's open."

She heard the sound of the car as it skirted the villa. But she was looking at Jacob's face. It startled her. He was beaming. His eyes were alight and he was smiling with an eagerness he made no attempt to conceal.

"They've come to stay with us, Alexia," he said. It was almost as if he were about to dance a joyous jig.

An unbearable jealousy seized her, and then she saw that he was not looking at the woman, but at the two men, and she realized how hungry he must be for the companionship of men. Men he could talk to as men, who would listen to him and answer him and discuss his views as well as their own.

Her inquiring glance embraced the two Americans. "Your wife is tired?" She made it pointed. "Perhaps some coffee—?"

The lean blond man, she saw, had reddened. He said, "Miss Porter is no longer . . . We are divorced. No doubt a cup of coffee would be very welcome." He seemed embarrassed.

The young woman with the gray-green eyes was looking at him searchingly. The tanned giant looked at the young woman. He is in love with her, Alexia thought; and I pity him.

She smiled and said, "I will bring freshly roasted coffee and tortillas. I will weaken the coffee because I know Americans do not find its full strength pleasing."

Jacob Wolf nodded and spoke quickly to her in German.

Rand watched her go through the door. She was a very handsome woman, he thought. He wondered if Wolf had run away from his wife and children because of her.

Jacob Wolf rubbed his hands briskly together and smiled.

"I am overjoyed that you will stay. We shall talk together. There are many rooms above. You may have your choice." He frowned. "But there are no beds. Nor bedclothing. They were taken. Alexia can buy them in the city tomorrow. Tonight I fear you will be uncomfortable. But we have blankets you may spread upon the floor."

Scotto said, "I'd rather sleep on the floor here than in a feather bed in the city. We're obliged to you, Mr. Wolf."

Rand said, "I don't suppose you have a radio."

"Radio?"

"I'd like to keep track of what the Leader has to say."

Wolf looked at him. "You are interested in the Leader?"

"As a newspaperman."

"I am sorry. We do not have a radio."

"Perhaps I can buy one tomorrow."

Wolf's face lighted. Rand thought how much healthier and stronger he looked than when he had first seen him in the hotel bar.

"You dare to go into the city, Herr Mansfield?"

"The American public has to have its breakfast news."

"A radio," Wolf said. "That would be a luxury." He seemed pleased. He smiled at them. "I am fortunate to have you as my guests." The smile left his face. He lifted his chin. "There is something I must tell you. Perhaps you will not wish to remain here when you have heard." There was a wistfulness in his deep dark eyes. "You will not offend me if you do not wish to stay."

Now he'll tell us why he really left his wife and children in that concentration camp, Rand thought. And I'm poking my nose out like a gossipy old woman.

"You don't have to tell us anything," he said.

"It is only fair."

But he did not speak of Germany. He told them of a man who had been his chauffeur, a man named Lucas Encisco, who had blackmailed him and attempted to attack Alexia. He told them how he had killed the man and buried him beneath the dirt floor of the cellar.

"BUT that is not all," he said. "Encisco had friends in brown shirts waiting outside. After two days they became curious. There were three of them. They entered the villa and searched for Encisco. When they went into the cellar I shot them. I buried them beside Encisco. They have not yet been discovered. But my hands are red with four murders. I thought perhaps you would not wish to stay under the same roof with a murderer."

Ardith spoke her first words. "There was nothing else you could do. I wish they all could be treated the same."

She looked extremely tired. She had sat down on the chair beside the rude table. Until now she had done nothing but stare at Rand as though she were trying to remember where she had seen him.

Scotto said, "Rand and I aren't in any position to call a kettle black."

Jacob Wolf was relieved and very happy.

"Thank you. Thank you all. Now you will remain here. I am very fortunate."

Alexia came in and put a wooden tray upon the table. There were two cups of steaming hot coffee and a plate of warmed tortillas on the tray.

"I made them," she explained. "But they are quite good."

Jacob Wolf smiled quickly and left the room.

Alexia handed a cup and a tortilla to Ardith and gave the same to Rand. They tasted very good. The coffee was still strong and bitter but stimulating.

"Your young Mexican is in the kitchen," Alexia said to Rand. "He is having coffee and warmed-over chile con carne. He is a nice young boy."

Scotto said with some embarrassment, "How does it taste?"

Rand saw that Alexia had offered him neither coffee nor tortillas.

"Have some of mine," he said.

"No, please," Jacob Wolf said. He had come back into the room carrying two thick cheap glasses and a bottle. He poured each glass a quarter full with the amber liquid from the bottle. He handed a glass to Scotto. "I knew you would prefer this." He was smiling.

Scotto's face glowed. He tasted the drink.

"Scotch," he said. "Beautiful scotch." He was very pleased.

"It is English," Wolf said. "But I like it regardless. Alexia bought it for me."

Scotto took a long swallow. His eyes beamed.

"How did you know about this and me?"

"I watched you in the hotel lounge," Wolf explained. He was proud of his hospitality and his observant eye. "Herr Mansfield prefers American rye whiskey."

Ardith looked up. The coffee and food had brightened her. She looked from Alexia to Wolf.

"I have heard some unpleasant rumors concerning you, Herr Wolf."

Wolf stiffened, his face instinctively lifting. Alexia's eyes flashed.

Ardith said, "But I do not believe them. They said you ran from danger. There is certainly danger in the city for you now. Yet you do not speak of running."

Wolf relaxed. He smiled. Alexia also smiled.

"No," Alexia said. "He will not run. He is through with running. We shall remain. No matter what happens, we shall remain."

They glanced at each other. Rand saw the calm strength that their eyes seemed to impart to one another. A security, he thought; a peaceful happiness and belief.

"I will never run again," said Wolf.

And regardless of what broke loose in the city, Rand thought, they both meant exactly what they said.

It was a fine attitude, he thought, despite the fact that it became more hopeless with the passing of each minute.

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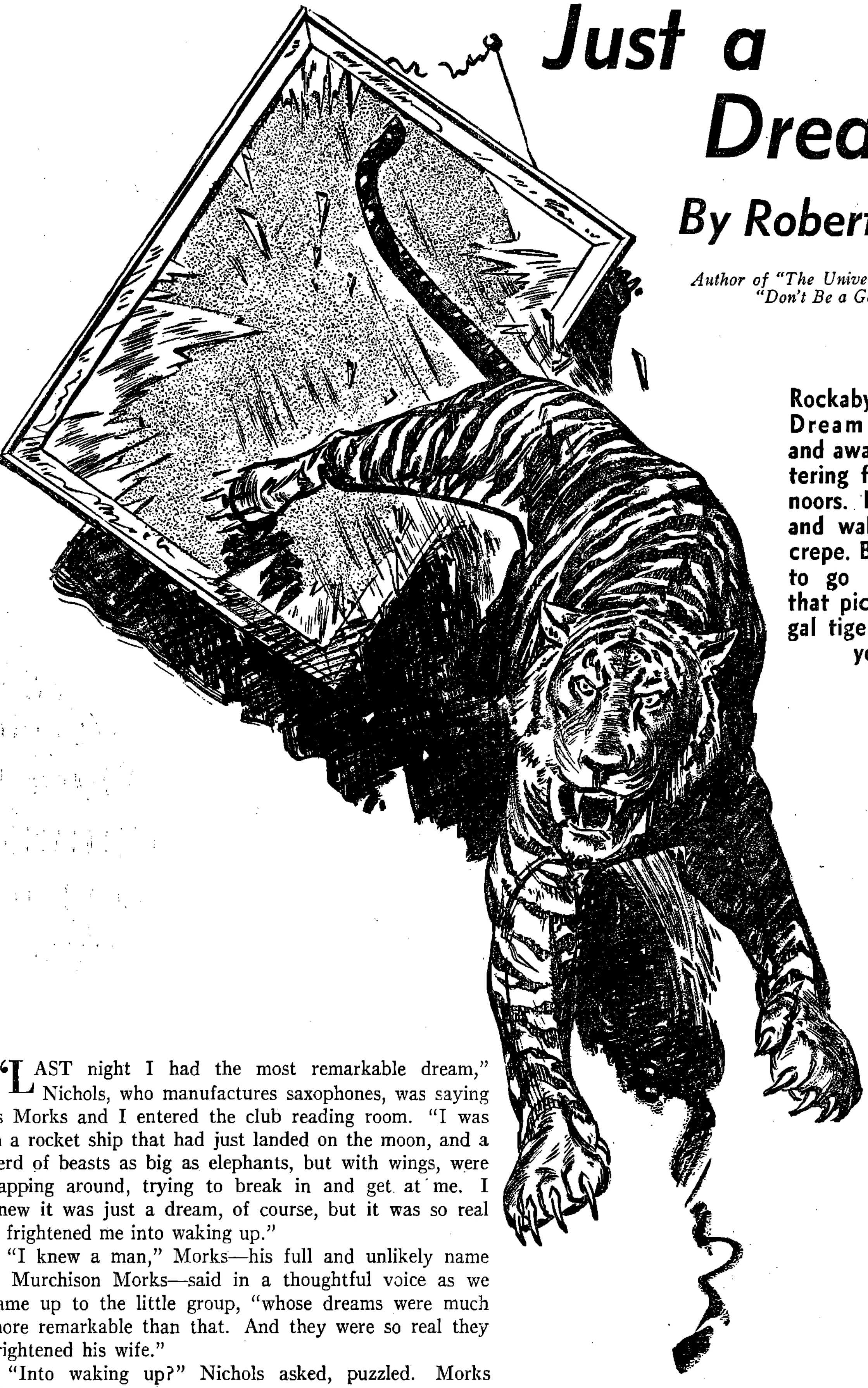

Just a Dreamer

By Robert Arthur

Author of "The Universe Broke Down," "Don't Be a Goose," etc.

Rockabye, my baby.... Dream of diamonds and awake with a glittering fistful of Kohinoors. Dream of death and wake up wearing crepe. But do you have to go to sleep with that picture of a Bengal tiger poised above your bed?

"LAST night I had the most remarkable dream," Nichols, who manufactures saxophones, was saying as Morks and I entered the club reading room. "I was in a rocket ship that had just landed on the moon, and a herd of beasts as big as elephants, but with wings, were flapping around, trying to break in and get at me. I knew it was just a dream, of course, but it was so real it frightened me into waking up."

"I knew a man," Morks—his full and unlikely name is Murchison Morks—said in a thoughtful voice as we came up to the little group, "whose dreams were much more remarkable than that. And they were so real they frightened his wife."

"Into waking up?" Nichols asked, puzzled. Morks shook his head.

"No. Into running away and leaving him, gasping with terror. She was a very strong-minded and unscrupulous woman; very hard to frighten, too."

Nichols got red in the face.

"As I was saying," he went on, tight-lipped, "after I got back to sleep, I dreamed that I had found Captain Kidd's treasure. The money was so real I could hear it chink when I dropped it, and—"

"When my friend dreamed of money," Murchison Morks put in, in that curiously soft voice which carried so remarkably, "it was so real you could spend it."

Nichols, crimson with anger, tried to ignore him.

"I wish you could have seen the beautiful girl who came up then," he said. "She—"

But Morks is a hard man to ignore.

"When my friend dreamed of a beautiful girl," he murmured, a faraway expression on his long, sad face, "you *could* see her."

Nichols turned from crimson to purple. But Morks had won. All eyes were turned on him. Morks, apparently unconscious of it, sank into the softest leather chair in the club and stared thoughtfully out of the window until I stopped a passing bar-boy, picked out the biggest drink on his tray, and put it in Morks' hand. Then Morks looked down, examined the drink, raised it to his lips, and after swallowing a third of it looked about him.

"Perhaps I ought to explain, though," he said courteously. "So no one will think that I am exaggerating. About my friend's dream, I mean."

And he began:

THIS friend of mine was named Weem—Wilfred Weem. He was a small man, with a friendly manner and a pleasant voice, and I once heard a woman say he had nice eyes. But he was very quiet, and I guessed he was hen-pecked. In this I proved to be right.

Weem was an accountant, and made a good income, which his wife, whose name was Henrietta, spent on herself as fast as he made it. His was not a very exciting occupation, and perhaps it was for that reason Weem took so much pleasure in his dreams. For they were, he explained to me later, very clear-cut and pleasant dreams about traveling through foreign lands, meeting interesting people, and such: things which in his waking life his wife certainly never permitted him to do, or even to think about.

It seems to have been shortly after moving to the Jersey suburbs that Wilfred Weem's dreams began to grow extraordinarily vivid. He himself suggested that his house being located within a hundred yards of the transmitter for the world's most powerful radio station might have had something to do with that. You know—the air full of curious energy currents, and so forth.

It's a fact that the antique iron dog on the lawn in front of the house could be heard singing torch songs, or giving the latest European news, almost any clear cold night. Radio experts explained it easily, but it was eerie to hear, and I have no doubt the other phenomenon I'm about to tell you of had some connection with the radio station.

I was sitting in the park one fine, sunny day, watching the swans, when Wilfred Weem came walking along in a somber manner. Seeing me, he sat down.

We conversed politely, then suddenly he burst out: "Morks, have you ever had a dream so real that—damn it, so real that somebody else could see it, too?"

I considered the matter, but was forced to say no. Weem mopped his brow.

"Well, *I* have," he said. "The night before last. And I've got to talk to somebody about it. Besides my wife, I mean, and that phoney doc. Alexander Q. Brilt, he calls himself, mental specialist; but he's a quack. He's a smooth-faced guy with big popping eyes and a black-ribbon pince-nez, and he's a phoney-doney."

Weem snorted. "But I'll tell you what happened," he said.

Two nights before he had gone to bed as usual in his tiny cubbyhole of a room, off the bedroom of his wife, who let him have a room to himself because he was allergic to her face powder, and got asthma when occupying the same bed.

He had been rather tired, so after glancing through a magazine had retired a bit earlier than usual. Henrietta had stayed up to curl her hair.

He had been asleep perhaps half an hour, and was dreaming of a prize Persian kitten he'd seen a photograph of in the magazine a short while earlier, when all of a sudden he realized that he was not only dreaming about the kitten, but stroking her as well.

He lay still for some seconds, as this realization came to him. The dream of a fluffy gray Persian kitten curled up on his bed, purring, continued. But as he dreamed, he could actually feel the soft fur beneath his fingers.

Then he knew he was in that curious condition we all achieve sometimes, of being both asleep and awake—asleep and dreaming with half our mind, I might say, awake with the rest.

He heard his watch ticking. He heard an automobile go past the house. And he heard the kitten purring.

He did not open his eyes, lest that wake him completely, but nevertheless a part of his mind was fully conscious. In his dream he could see the curled-up kitten perfectly. With his hand he could feel her. Stroke her back, smoothing the fur, and feel the small, rough tongue lick his finger.

IT CAME to him then, in a vague sort of way, that something very strange was happening. He knew they owned no kitten: Henrietta hated all animals, except a moulty canary she fussed over as if it were a baby.

Then the kitten mewed, quite plainly, as if hungry. Immediately Wilfred began to dream that a bowl of cream was on the floor beside the bed; and as if looking for it, the kitten under his hand got up, jumped down to the floor—he heard the thump as it landed—and then Wilfred Weem heard a lapping sound.

Puzzled, he let one hand slip down beside the bed, and there was the kitten, busily lapping up a bowl of cream.

He was so surprised that he sat up and opened his eyes. Naturally he stopped dreaming. He looked over the side of the bed for the kitten, but it wasn't there. No trace of it or the bowl of cream remained.

He was puzzled, and a little upset. But presently he told himself that it all had been a dream, unusual in its vividness as so many of his dreams had been since moving into this house where, likely as not, the faucets would broadcast hill-billy music when you took a bath. So he went back to sleep.

Presently he was dreaming again. This time, for no good reason—you know how dreams are—he seemed to find himself the owner of a very handsome, leather-cased, luminous-dialed clock that had been advertised on the same page of the magazine that had held the picture of the kitten. He could see it clearly, even the grain of the pigskin and the position of the luminous hands. They stood at eleven forty-four.

Then Weem became aware that he was again in that half waking, half sleeping condition—and he heard a clock ticking beside him.

Cautiously he stretched out a hand. On the table beside his bed was a clock which had not been there when he retired. It was leather-encased square, with metal corner pieces.

Realizing now that something highly unusual was indeed occurring, Weem risked opening his eyes slightly. He managed to do it without disturbing that segment of his mind which was still dreaming, and he saw the clock. Standing there on the table, as it did in the dream, glowing dimly in the darkness, the hands at eleven forty-four.

Weem opened his eyes wide then, and the dream faded at once. And at exactly the same instant, the clock faded away too. By the time he was wide awake, it was quite gone.

"You see?" Weem asked me anxiously. "You understand? I was not only dreaming that kitten and that clock—*but while I dreamed them, they actually existed!*"

I nodded. I understood. It was an upsetting thought. It's all very well to dream about a kitten and have one come to life on your bed. But suppose you had a nightmare instead? Nightmares are very different matters. The thought of dreaming into existence certain nightmares of my own gave me rather a nasty turn. I mentioned this, and Weem nodded.

"That's worried me, too, Morks," he admitted. "Now I don't think there's much danger, though. I believe that I can dream only real things: things that actually exist, or have existed. But of course, there in the darkness, I was in a cold sweat at the thought of having a nightmare. I tried to stay awake. I pinched myself, and pulled my hair. But I seemed to be exhausted. I couldn't keep from dozing off. And then—then the worst possible thing happened."

"You did have a nightmare?" I asked.

"No." He shook his head. "I dreamed about a girl. A very pretty girl, with nice blue eyes and honey-colored hair. She was the image of a girl whose picture was in the magazine. It was a page showing what was in style at Palm Beach, and she was wearing a bathing suit. A two-piece lastex suit, quite brief. She was young, and very pretty, and in my dream she was smiling at me, as she had been in her picture."

"And—"

"Yes," Weem said. "Just like the kitten and the clock. She was really there. I reached out and she took my hand. Her fingers were warm, exactly as any living person's would be, and I could even hear her breathing, very softly. I could smell a faint odor of perfume. And she started to speak. I heard her plainly. She said, 'My name is—'

Wilfred Weem paused. "And then," he groaned, "Henrietta burst into the room!"

HE RAN his finger slowly around inside his collar.

"She'd been curling her hair," he said. "And she'd heard me tossing about, as I was trying to stay awake. So she peeked in the keyhole, to see what was the matter. And—she saw the girl."

He shuddered a little at the recollection.

"Of course," he told me, "when she burst through the doorway, I came fully awake and the girl was gone. Henrietta was in a fury. It was only when she saw the screen was in place, and nobody was hidden in the room, that she'd let me get a word in. Even then it was almost morning before she'd half believe the truth about it being only an extraordinary dream.

"But I showed her the picture in the magazine, so she could see for herself it was the same girl. That at least made her realize I might be telling the truth. So first thing in the morning she dragged me around to see this Doctor Brilt, this phoney psychoanalyst some of her friends had raved to her about."

Dr. Alexander Q. Brilt had tried to get him to demonstrate, there in his office, his peculiar dream-power. Weem was tired enough to sleep, indeed, but his dreaming produced no tangible results. Therefore, seeing the grim look of renewed suspicion gathering on Henrietta's features, he had insisted that the doctor come to the house in Jersey that evening.

"That was last night," Weem told me. "I had to convince him, you see, in order to convince Henrietta. I did think perhaps the power would be gone, that it had just been temporary; but it wasn't. It was easier than the night before. I just looked at a picture of a mink coat in the magazine, then lay down and went to sleep—half asleep, anyway; enough to set part of my mind to dreaming about the coat. I dreamed that it lay across the chair in the living room, and at once I heard a squeal from Henrietta.

"'A mink coat!' she exclaimed. 'Good Heavens! I wonder how it would look on me?'

"I opened my eyes a little, and through the open door saw her trying the coat on. But then the phone rang—it was a wrong number—and I woke up entirely. The coat faded away, right off Henrietta's shoulders, and she became indignant.

"I might have stayed asleep long enough for her to see how she looked in it, she told me. Heaven knew, she'd never have any other chance to see herself in a mink coat, real or dreamed. And so on. But Brilt quieted her. He asked me if I could do it again.

"I was feeling awfully tired, so instead of punching him in the nose—I just didn't like anything about him—I proved that I could. I dreamed an overstuffed chair, a bowl of tropical fish, and a set of book ends, all of which were pictured in the magazine. I tried to dream something I hadn't seen a picture of, but nothing happened when I did.

"And after all that, Brilt just nodded as if he'd seen a hundred men do the same thing, and said it was a very interesting case. Interesting case, indeed!"

Weem snorted again.

"After that he asked Henrietta to come in and see him at his office today," he glowered. "She's there now. They're cooking up something, and I'd like to know what. I don't trust people who wear glasses on black ribbons and use big words."

Weem looked at his watch then, and jumped up, appearing agitated.

"I'll have to hurry or I'll be late meeting her," he stammered. "I'm glad I could talk to you, Morks. It's eased my mind some. But I've got to hurry now, or Henrietta will be angr—"

His voice faded out as he hurried down the path toward Fifty-ninth Street.

I DID not see him again for several weeks. But one afternoon when I was sunning myself in the park again, he came hurrying up as if he had been looking for me. His first words proved he had.

"Morks," he said desperately, "I'm glad to see you again. I must—I want to ask your advice."

We sat down. He was thin and haggard, with dark circles of fatigue under his eyes. His hand shook as he held a match for my cigarette. He didn't smoke; his wife wouldn't let him.

Then he told me of the developments since our previous conversation. . . .

He had been surprised when Dr. Alexander Q. Brilt had appeared at his home that evening after he had last seen me. But Henrietta seemed to be expecting him. Dr. Brilt explained suavely that he wished to make some additional notes on Wilfred Weem's case. He hoped Weem wouldn't mind. Weem did mind, and a lot, but Henrietta overruled him. Of course Wilfred didn't mind, she said. Wilfred was only too glad to oblige.

Reluctantly, Wilfred lay down on the couch, and the doctor took from his pocket a green object, which he held out for Weem to gaze at. It was a ten-dollar bill.

"Please," he said, in a liquid tone, "gaze at this carefully. Impress it upon your mind. For curiosity's sake, I wish to see if you can reproduce it as you did the other objects."

Weem stared at the ten-dollar bill. He noted every detail of it, including the far-seeing, eagle stare of Alexander Hamilton's portrait. Then, fatigued from two nights without real rest, he drifted off to slumber. And began dreaming.

"But not about ten-dollar bills," Weem told me, with the ghost of a chuckle. "I already had a pretty good idea I could only dream things I'd seen *pictures* of, and not the real things themselves. The dreams are projections of the pictures, I guess you'd say, not reproductions of the reality. Anyway, I dreamed of Alexander Hamilton."

A faint smile quirked the corners of his lips.

"It was quite a shock to Henrietta and Dr. Brilt to find Alexander Hamilton in the room with them, giving them that proud, imperious stare. He looked at them, and didn't like them. He sneered. Sneered very plainly. They were so startled they couldn't speak. Alexander Hamilton took a pinch of snuff and sneezed loudly into a handkerchief.

"Of course, it wasn't *the* Alexander Hamilton. It was my dream projection of his portrait. Real, of course, as long as I dreamed him, but not the original.

"Just as, Morks, if you gave me a snapshot of yourself, and I looked at it before falling asleep, then dreamed of it, the Morks that would come into being wouldn't be *you*."

He was very anxious for me to understand this part of the curious phenomenon, and I assured him I did. So he went on.

"Then Henrietta recovered enough from her fright to screech, and that woke me up. So Alexander Hamilton vanished. But Brilt and Henrietta were thoroughly upset, and had had enough for one evening. Brilt hurried off, and I took a sleeping tablet and went to bed. I never dream when I take sleeping tablets.

"The next morning I told Henrietta that we would have to move. That away from that house I would be all right. But she said no. That it was nonsense. That we had signed a lease and would have to stay. She was very emphatic about it. So I knew we wouldn't move."

WILFRED WEEM was silent for a moment, brooding. Then he took up the story. "I thought we were through with that quack, Brilt, though," he muttered darkly. "But that very next night he came around again, and Henrietta welcomed him like an old friend. This time he'd brought a *picture* of a ten-dollar bill, a glossy photograph.

"So naturally, when I dreamed—Henrietta made me try it—I dreamed a ten-dollar bill. Lying on the living room table. Half awake, I saw Henrietta and Brilt feel it, stare at it; then Brilt looked at it through a microscope.

"They seemed excited, and they whispered together. Brilt took the ten-dollar bill and went out. I guessed he was going to try to spend it, to see if it was a perfect reproduction. So I waited a couple of minutes, then made myself wake up.

"Of course, when I did the bill vanished out of his pocket; and he came back ten minutes later hopping mad. Henrietta was mad, too. They said I'd spoiled an important part of an important scientific experiment. I said I couldn't help it. So Brilt put on his hat and left. Only, before he went, he whispered something to Henrietta. And the next evening he was back again."

Wilfred Weem took out his handkerchief and mopped his brow. His eyes were dark wells of weariness and perplexity.

"Morks," he said unhappily, "what happened after Brilt arrived that time, *I don't know*."

"You don't know?" I repeated.

"I can't remember a thing. Until I woke the next morning, feeling like the very devil. I had an impression I had dreamed something all night long, but I couldn't remember what. Henrietta insisted I'd just gotten sleepy and gone to bed, and that I hadn't dreamed a thing. I'd have believed her, but—"

Weem's eyes held mine with desperate intensity.

"But," he finished, "*the same thing has happened every night for ten nights now!*"

I pondered this. It was a highly significant fact.

"And I want to know what has been going on those nights I can't remember!" Weem said. "I am determined to know. Something most peculiar, Morks, because almost every morning when I wake up, Henrietta has some new luxury.

"The first time it was a mink coat. Then an ermine jacket. Next a string of pearls. Then a set of silverware. After that a flagon of highly expensive perfume. And yesterday morning it was an emerald bracelet."

I asked how his wife explained them.

"She says I dreamed them," Weem muttered glumly. "She says I dreamed them, and they—stayed. Didn't vanish. Because Dr. Brilt, the smooth-faced phoney-doney, has been helping me concentrate in my sleep by whispering suggestions to me. She the same as says he's been hypnotizing me into dreaming them so hard they didn't go back when I woke up. But I don't believe her."

He gnawed his lip.

"Or maybe it's true after all!" he exclaimed wildly. "I don't know what to think. Morks, I'm going crazy. I wake up in the morning feeling a hundred years old. I sleep all day at my office and all night at home, and every day I feel worse. I've got to stop dreaming things. I've got to get away from that house, to some place where I can get a decent night's sleep. And Henrietta won't let me."

He was in a highly overwrought state. So I quickly told him that I might be able to help. However, I pointed out that first we must know what occurred during those nights of which he had no memory. He saw my point, and we agreed that that evening I would come secretly to his home and hide myself in the shrubbery.

Dr. Brilt usually arrived at nine. After he had entered, I would slip up to the window which Weem would leave slightly open, and watch and listen. The next day we would meet at my apartment, and I could tell him what had happened and make further plans.

THAT night, shortly before nine, I hid myself in the deep shadow of some lilac bushes, just outside the living room window of Weem's modest Jersey home. A hundred yards away the great towers supporting the radio aerials loomed against the night sky, bejeweled with little red lights.

The antique dog on the front lawn was, in an uncanny manner, singing *Jeanie With the Light Brown Hair,* and the rain spout was echoing it at a higher pitch. I was wondering what radio salesmen did for a living in that neighborhood when a coupé stopped at the curb, and a tall man with a curiously pale, smooth face came up the walk, knocked, and was admitted. Then through the window I watched what followed.

It was much as I had suspected it would be. Dr. Alexander Q. Brilt, as he shook Weem's reluctant hand, stared fixedly into his eyes. Weem's face became blank. Brilt was a good hypnotist.

"You are going to sleep soundly tonight, Weem," he murmured, his tone unctuous. "But first, I have a picture for you to look at. Here it is. It's a picture of money—of a fresh package of ten-dollar bills. A hundred bills in all. Fix it in your mind. Now you're going to bed, aren't you? You're going to sleep. You're going to sleep soundly until morning, and every second of that time you're going to dream about this picture of ten-dollar bills. Aren't you?"

"Yes, doctor," Weem muttered, without inflection. "I'm going to dream about the ten-dollar bills."

He moved slowly off and disappeared into his bedroom. Ten minutes passed. Dr. Brilt and Henrietta Weem, a large woman with a pronounced jaw and a snub nose, sat tensely waiting, saying nothing.

Then from nowhere a small package appeared on the living room table. Dr. Brilt pounced upon it, broke the manila wrapper, and extracted a handful of crisp green slips that were undoubtedly ten-dollar bills.

He riffled them through his fingers, and the look on his and Mrs. Weem's face was avid.

"Too bad they aren't as real as they look," he remarked. "Eh, Henrietta? But they're the next best thing. I trust you have ordered nothing for tonight, as tonight is my night, and I placed an order in town for delivery here, as usual."

Henrietta Weem sighed.

"There was a sable jacket that I wanted, advertised in today's paper," she said fretfully. "But I didn't forget it was your night."

"Good! We can't have too many unexplained losses occurring all at once, you know. So far, though, everything has gone just as I predicted. I told you those rascally delivery men would take care of themselves. Every one so far has claimed he was held up, when he came to turn in the money and couldn't find it."

The door bell interrupted him. I had been so engrossed I had not seen the delivery truck stop, nor the uniformed messenger come up to the door. But the messenger stepped into the room when Henrietta Weem opened the door. He held a small, securely wrapped parcel.

"Watch from Tiffany's, special order, to be delivered C.O.D. tonight to Mrs. Henrietta Weem, this address," he said briskly. "You Mrs. Weem?"

"I am," Henrietta Weem said decisively. "How much is it?"

"Nine hunnered fifty-eight dollars, sixty cents, including sales tax."

"Platinum," Dr. Brilt murmured dreamily. "Swiss movement, thirty-nine jewels. A repeater, with special dials for the day of the month and the phases of the moon."

Mrs. Weem, evidently well rehearsed in her act, counted out the money from the pile of ten-dollar bills on the table, received change and a signed receipt, and the messenger left, seeming to sense nothing unusual.

"Well, that's that," Brilt stated then, when the truck had gone. "Your husband will continue dreaming the money into existence until tomorrow morning, and by that time its strange disappearance will in no way be associated with us. I must be going now. It occurs to me, Henrietta, that we had best make no more purchases for a while, lest too many trips to the well break the pitcher."

Mrs. Weem looked sullen. "I want that sable jacket," she said determinedly. "After that we can stop."

Brilt shrugged. "Very well, Henrietta. After tomorrow, then, we'll allow a slight interlude. For the present, good night."

He dropped the package containing the watch into his pocket and left. Henrietta Weem tossed the four remaining ten-dollar bills into the wastebasket and turned out the light. I slipped away to my parked car. As I left, the iron dog was heatedly assailing the Administration for spending so much money.

THE next afternoon in my apartment, Wilfred Weem was horrified at what I told him. He flushed, then paled. "But that's *stealing!*" he cried. "They're buying expensive things with the bills I dream, that vanish when I wake up, and—"

I agreed that it was certainly dishonest, and Weem sank back into his chair.

"Morks," he groaned, "I knew Henrietta was selfish and greedy, and of course she's always spent all my money on things for herself, but I never guessed she'd do a thing like this. It—it's monstrous."

He shook his head. His face was haggard, his eyes hollow. "What can we do? It wouldn't do any good to try to reason with Henrietta, and I—"

He didn't go on, but I understood. And I told him that, having given the matter some thought, I believed I knew of a way to reform his wife and Brilt. It would take a day or so to accomplish; but I felt I could promise him results.

I suggested that he go home that night, and by the simple expedient of going to bed and being asleep from the effect of a sleeping powder, he could foil the two temporarily. Asleep, of course he could not be hypnotized. Then, I said, if he would drop in again the next day, I would give him further details.

Taking heart, Wilfred Weem left, and I went to the phone and called up a promising young artist whom I knew. I gave him full instructions, said I wanted the work finished by noon the next day, and received his promise on this point.

When, the following afternoon, I told Wilfred Weem what I had in mind, his face brightened. A smile touched his lips—the first in some time. He promised to follow instructions exactly, and said he would expect me that night about eight thirty.

At eight thirty exactly—I always like to be exact—I rang his bell. He admitted me, and I stepped into his little living room. Henrietta Weem gave me a look of glowering suspicion.

Weem introduced me as an art dealer who had promised to stop by with a picture which had taken his fancy, and I gave him the flat package I had been carrying.

"A picture?" Henrietta Weem snorted. "What kind of picture, Wilfred?"

"Oh, just a picture for my room," Weem said vaguely. "Hmmm." Holding the picture under his arm, still wrapped, he turned the key of his door back and forth, as if testing the lock. "Needs oil, I think."

"Wilfred, what are you doing?" His wife's tone was ominous.

"Er—just making sure my door will lock tightly," Wilfred told her. "I thought that tonight I might want to lock it, and—"

Henrietta Weem snatched the picture from him.

"Lock your door?" she screeched. "Wilfred, I'm going to find out just what you're up to."

SHE ripped the paper off the picture. Then, as she stared at the painting beneath, she turned pale and gave a startled squeak. "Wilfred! You wouldn't!"

"I'm just going to hang it above the foot of my bed, where I can see it the last thing before I go to sleep." Weem took the picture from his large wife's nerveless hands. "Lifelike work, don't you think?"

"Wilfred!" There was fright in Henrietta Weem's gasp. "You—you— If you went to sleep looking at that, you'd—"

Weem did not answer. He held the picture out at arm's length, admiringly, and Henrietta Weem stared at him.

"You would!" She choked. "You—you murderer!"

"I think," Wilfred Weem said pleasantly, "that I'm going to be very fond of this work, Mr. Morks. I've always dreamed"—he lingered over the word—"of owning a genuine masterpiece."

It was at this point that Mrs. Weem's nerve broke. She screeched hysterically, and rushed for the coat closet. Not even thinking to seize up one of the ill-gotten fur wraps hanging there, she snatched at the first coat she found. Jamming on a hat, she jerked open the front door.

"I'm going to Dr. Brilt," she gasped, breathing heavily. "He'll make you—"

"Bring him back with you," Wilfred Weem advised her cheerfully. "Be sure and tell him about the picture, though. Or better still, perhaps you should stay with him. I think you've forfeited any claims on me, Henrietta; and I assure you, I do not intend to part with this work of art.

"If Brilt doesn't want to take you in and give you shelter, and marry you after you divorce me, threaten you'll tell the police what the two of you've been up to. I think he'll listen to reason then. Now"—he yawned luxuriously—"I think I'll go to bed. *To sleep—*" he winked at me—*"perchance to dream."*

Henrietta gave a strangled scream, and sobbing half in rage, half in fear, slammed the door and ran down the walk. Weem smiled at me.

He held the picture up to the light, and I was forced to admit it was. I had told the young artist to go to the zoo and paint the leanest and hungriest tiger they had, the bigger the better. He had followed instructions. And the beast that glared out at us from the canvas, over the title *Starving Tiger,* had the most famished look I have ever seen on any creature.

Weem turned the thing face down on the table.

"Ho hum," he yawned. "I really am going to bed. And I'm going to take a tablet. No dreams tonight! And tomorrow"—his words were emphatic—"tomorrow I'm going to move away from this house."

"Drop in and see me tomorrow, then," I said. "I know a lawyer who may be able to break your lease for you. I'll give you his name and address."

Weem thanked me fervently, promised he would, and I left. But—(Murchison Morks, at this point, paused to gaze around at the little group that was listening)—when Weem stopped by my apartment early the next evening, he refused to take the name of the lawyer I wanted to give him. He shook his head, firmly.

"Er—thanks, Morks," he said. "But I don't think I'll get in touch with him just yet. Henrietta didn't return; I was quite sure she wouldn't. And I slept like a top last night. Felt fine today for the first time in weeks. It's remarkable what a pleasant little place that house is, after all. I actually enjoyed hearing an installment of a heart-rending radio serial from my electric razor.

"In fact, I—ah—well, to tell you the truth, the house is for sale and I rather think I'll buy it."

I must have stared at him strangely, for he colored a bit.

"Yes, I know. I did want to get away. But I've changed my mind on that point since—er, since Henrietta left me. Now that I can do as I please, I don't find the house at all distressing. But I won't bother you any more. I'm still a bit tired, so I think I'll just go on home and get into bed with a good book."

He had a book under his arm, in fact: a large, flat volume.

"That book?" I asked him.

"Um—yes," Weem admitted. "I saw it in a bookstore today, and it occurred to me that I ought to own a copy."

"Oh," I said. "I see. Well, in that case, Weem, good luck."

"Thanks," he replied, quite seriously, and hurried out. I haven't seen him since. I'm sorry, too. I really did want to ask him about. . . .

BUT Morks let his narration die away into silence without finishing the final sentence. He leaned back and put his finger tips together, as if meditating on something. Nichols, finding nothing to say, stamped off, face purple. It was one of the younger members of the club who broke the silence with a question.

"What," he asked, "was the book?"

Morks looked at him.

"Why," he said, "it was a volume of color reproductions of the works of various great painters. Fine pictures, you know. The title of it was, *The Hundred Most Beautiful Women in History."*

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

THERE'S scarcely room in our office to sit down this week. You see, it's stacked high with explosives—innocent and childish ones. A visiting author just sat down on a firecracker, to his annoyance; and if our secretary doesn't get that Roman candle out of her hair, there is going to be trouble.

You see how it is. We are going out pretty soon with all this stuff and make a lot of noise. We are going to try very hard to make so much harmless racket that we will momentarily drown out the so-different thunder of a world at war.

Now here's a long letter from a reader down South who has several kicks and several compliments to offer.

W. B. MACQUEEN

I'm one of your oldtimers who's forever rearing back and raising hell about this innovation or that. I admit without further loss of time that I'm one who'd prefer the Argosy the way it was in the old days, meaning from about 1917 through 1940, with especial reference to 1921-22-23-24 and 1931-32-33.

On the other hand, I rise with pride and say that I kept the temper and didn't squawk when you changed from the old format to the present one. I was saying to myself, whatever happens to Argosy, I'm with 'er to the bitter end.

If this new size increases the old circulation, then more power to you, and I, like thousands of others, will likely stick around.

To-day, I find myself with two compliments and one or two kicks for you.

Kicks first: I don't like Dikar and the Bunch, I don't like two-part serials, and I hate the guy who does your inside illustrations for Westerns. If the latter is an artist, I'm a helluva poor judge. As to Dikar, isn't that getting a little too close to home? Haven't imaginative Americans enough to worry about, without having to picture this country under the iron heel, even if an accidental and pseudo-Tarzan does happen to come along in the nick of time?

I admit it might be, but I suggest that if you must show us the future, show us an America that has survived these damnable times. Better still, let the matter drop, and give us fantasies such as Merritt used to do. "Fantasy," as I understand it, implies the capricious exercise of the imagination. Do I buy Argosy for a touch of reality? No, Suh, not I! I buy it for escape—in any direction, South Seas, far North, West, East—any place but here!

And while I'm on the subject, how about less of this Fifth Column stuff? I think I'm a good American, and I think I know where the danger lies, but I get good and tired of finding reality in my escape literature. I took two degrees in English literature. I know where to find life, with all its sadness and all its disappointment.

Give me a Western—a horse-opera, if you will, a tale of the Yukon in the gold-rush days, a good murder mystery without a Nazi for a villain. Or give me something with a touch of humor in it—if you can. I know the world is a tough place: don't repeat that to me—show me Romance, and make me believe it's true. That's the Argosy I've been buying all these years.

Two big compliments for you: (1) The new cover, beginning with the April 26 issue, seems to be what we've been looking for. In this man's opinion, it's the best ever, and I honestly believe it will set Argosy apart, the way you've been wanting to set 'er apart from the usual run of pulps.

(2) I can't find too much praise for Jack Byrne's "Gunswift." If I abhorred all Westerns, as some persons do, I'd still like that story. Here's one vote that says it's great, looking at it from any angle you want to take it. Utterly different as to style, utterly new in treatment; action, mystery, gunplay, suspense—what could you ask? Say, I liked that guy, and I liked that gal, and I felt repeatedly that I'd never read a Western like that before.

If it didn't have everything, I'd like for some kind soul to tell me what it lacked! I finished it with something mighty close to a sigh, and I said to myself: Now here's a tale that somehow puts me in mind of the Argosy as she used to be—the Argosy I read when I was wearing short pants and going barefooted, the Argosy that helped me live when all else had skedaddled out the window, or somepin'. I wish Jack Byrne could know, whoever he is, with what fervor I'd like to shake his hand.

And doggone it, give us three serials or give us two; what's the use in making a two-part serial out of a novelet? I never have figured that out. Let the majority rule. My vote's for three big 'uns; but anyhow, the two-parters don't count, and you know it.

'Nuff said. Selah, etc. I've always wished the best of luck to Argosy, and I still do!

Columbia, S. C.

OUR next correspondent is not so well pleased with the new cover. Judging from our recent mail, we are certain that he is in the minority. Here is the opposition.

RICHARD P. SCHURLHAMMER

To begin with, I'm not the kind of a fellow who usually complains. I've read Argosy for a number of years and have always been more than satisfied with it. Literally, I live your magazine from cover to cover every week.

I have more than heartily approved your changes in it, for it has become better to handle and to read.

But why did you have to change the cover? The newsreel effect of your previous cover I thought was very typical of the magazine. When you announced that the cover would be changed, I looked forward to seeing something good. When I picked up my latest issue from the newsstand, I was more than just disappointed; I was actually shocked.

I thought that Argosy was better than the general run of fiction magazines. Don't you think that it is? The cover that you have on it now certainly doesn't measure up to the contents of the Argosy.

Give Argosy back its old eye appeal, because looks are always the best seller.

Elyria, Ohio

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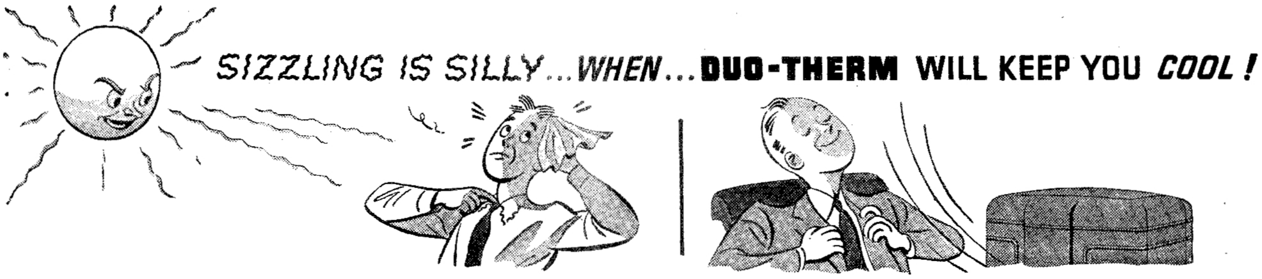

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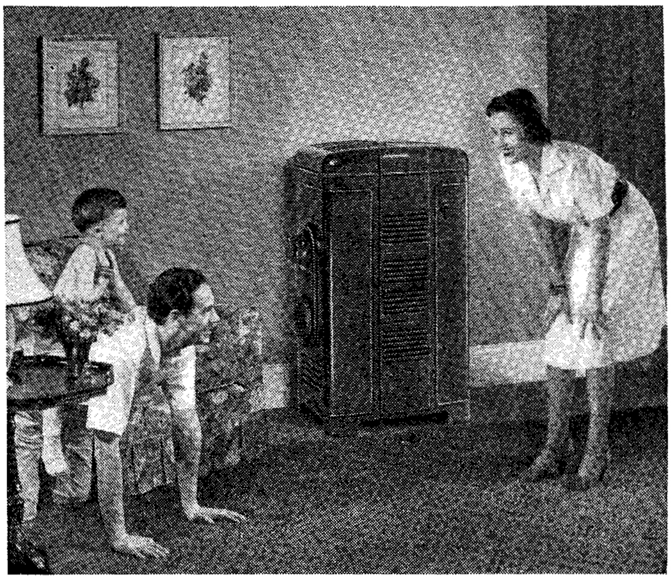

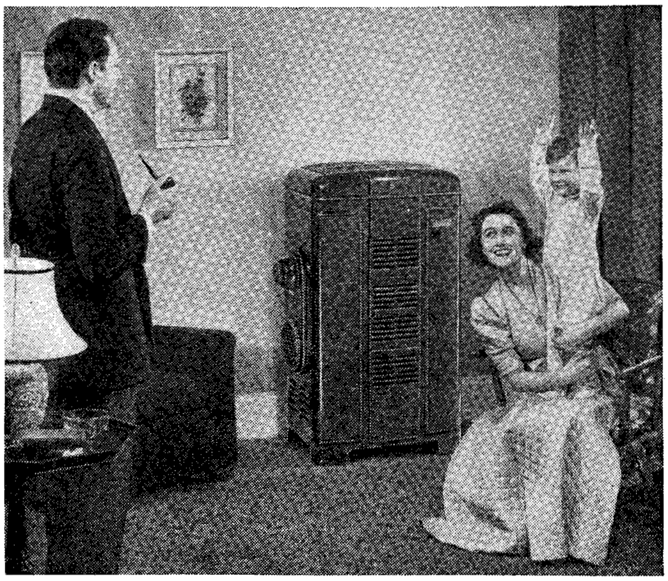

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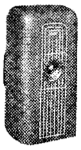

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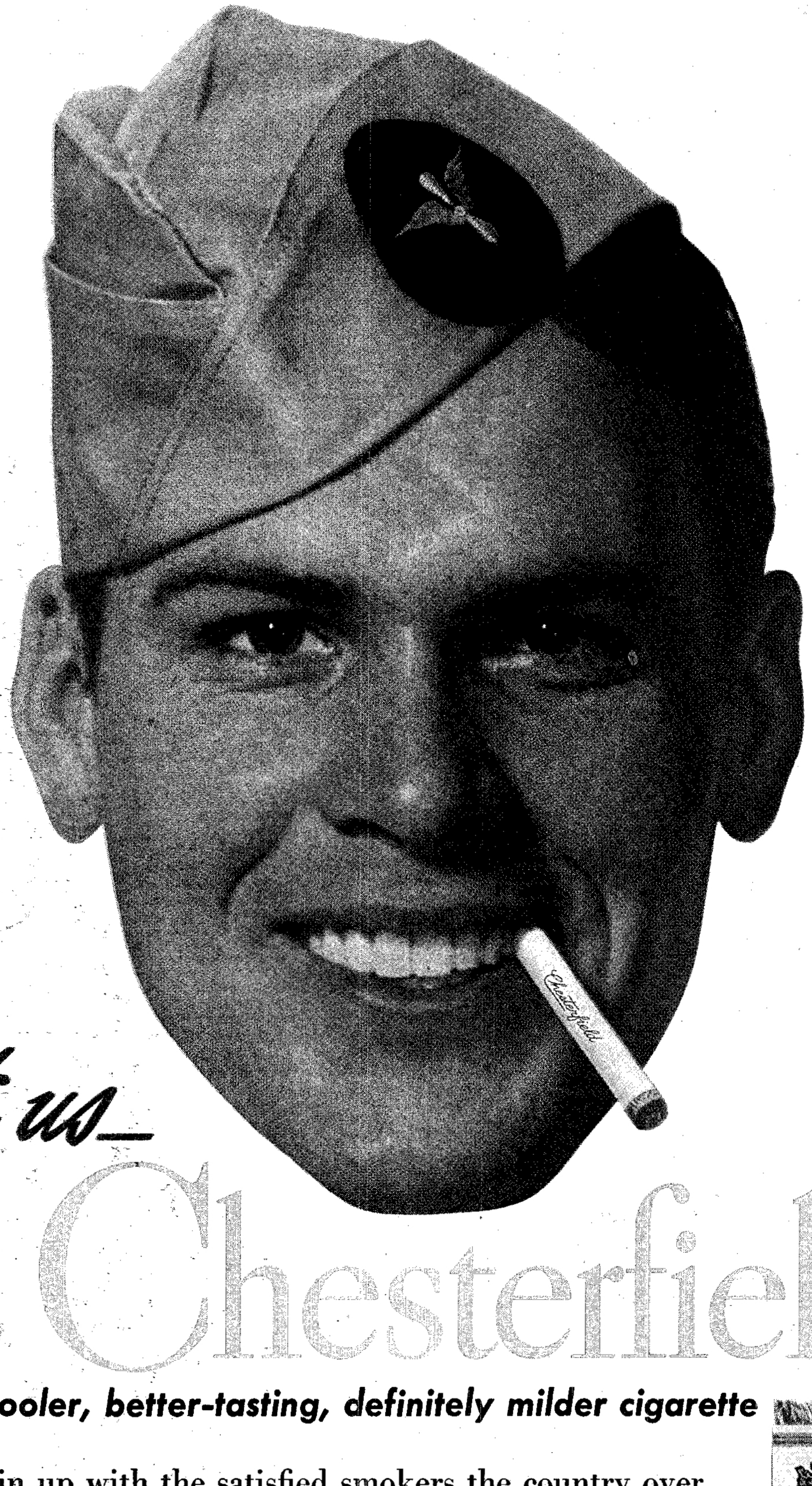
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